

DRAFT PREVIEW

2025



Matthew
SCHAEFER

**TOP
100**
PROSPECTS
& SCOUTING
REPORTS

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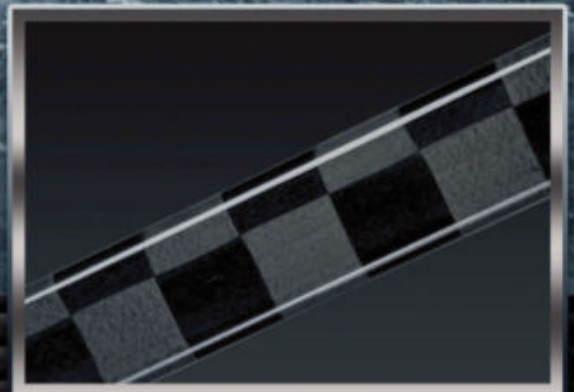
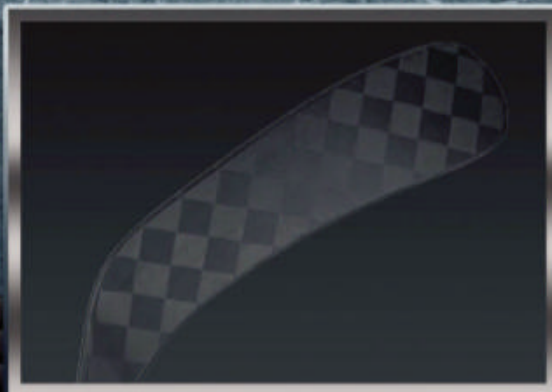
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PHOTO BY BRANDON TAYLOR



PHOTO BY BRANDON TAYLOR



ISLANDER INTRIGUE

H EADING INTO THE NHL'S draft lottery, I hadn't even thought of the Isles as an option to get the first pick in 2025. New York had been a decent team this year, and yes, the club fell short of the post-season, but like most, my mind was stuck on San Jose, Chicago and Nashville.

So, it was nice to see a team that has not been going through a rebuild get rewarded with some luck, and it also reinforced why the NHL has a lottery system in the first place: the draft ain't a charity, friends.

Amazingly, the Islanders haven't had a top-10 pick since 2014, when they took left winger Michael Dal Colle fifth overall. The last time they chose first was when they took John Tavares in 2009, a selection that was met with great fanfare and resulted in a player who earned first-team all-star honors in 2015 and finished third in Hart Trophy voting twice, in 2013 and 2015. Yes, the Tavares era ended in heartbreak and vitriol when he signed with Toronto in 2018, but he was the face of the Islanders for nearly a decade before that.

In 2000, the Islanders went bold at No. 1 when they tabbed goaltender Rick DiPietro over the likes of Dany Heatley and Marian Gaborik. DiPietro's injury-laden career will best be remembered for the infamous 15-year contract he signed with New York, and that's unfortunate, because he truly seemed to love playing for the franchise.

The first No. 1 pick in franchise history was Billy Harris in 1972. He had a solid run with the team, but in a roundabout way, his best contribution was getting traded to Los Angeles in the deal that brought Butch Goring to town. Goring was part of the Islanders' dynasty that won four straight Stanley Cups – something that, let's face it, will *never* happen again – alongside the 1973 No. 1 overall pick for the Islanders, Denis Potvin.

Potvin became one of the best players in franchise history, and it is interesting that he was a defenseman since the top prospect in this year's draft is also a blueliner. You can read Ken Campbell's feature on Matthew Schaefer on pg. 18 as we all wait to see what the Islanders do when their pick is announced in Los Angeles' Peacock Theater on June 27.

By all accounts, Schaefer would be a tremendous pick-up for the Islanders, as he is incredible on the ice and appears to be a great



kid off of it as well. There is a chance that New York goes in a different direction – if the team wants a forward, for example – but that will be up to the new brain trust that replaces former GM Lou Lamoriello.

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, SCHAEFER WOULD BE A TREMENDOUS PICK-UP FOR THE ISLANDERS

These are interesting times to be an Islanders fan, and it will be exciting to see what the team looks like after the draft. New York has been known as a hardworking team that just needed more high-end skill to take that next step, and now, the franchise has an opportunity to get such an asset. Will they surprise us all on draft day or go with the Best Player Available and hope Schaefer can be a difference-maker? We'll have to wait and see. But that's the fun when it comes to the draft, isn't it? **H**

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SUBSCRIPTIONS Minimum one-year subscription price: \$44.95 including tax for print and digital; \$29.95 including tax for digital. • The Hockey News (ISSN 0018-3016) publishes 12 issues per year, including Yearbook/Fantasy Guide, Draft Preview, Prospects Unlimited and Champions Collector's Editions. **Mail In Canada:** The Hockey News, PO Box 23022, Brantford, ON N3T 6K4 **Mail In the US:** The Hockey News, PO Box 904, Buffalo, NY 14240-9554

PRINTING RBW Graphics, 2049 20th Street East, Owen Sound, ON N4K 5R2

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CARL BELANGER: 1971-2025

Peacekeeper And Protector

Une Vie Bien Vécue

MASTER WARRANT OFFICER CARL Belanger served for 30 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. He also served a further nine years in the protection of my mother as the 6-foot-4 gentle giant neighbor from across the street. Unfortunately, I will never be able to repay the debt that I owe him.

Carl was born in Jonquiere, Que., in 1971, and he enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces when he was just 17, needing permission from his parents to do so. After basic training at the Canadian Forces Base in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que., and English language school at CFB in Borden, Ont., he was posted at CFB Calgary, where he met his future wife and partner in life, Elizabeth.

From a young age, Carl always knew that he was going to be a soldier in the military, where his physical and intellectual talents would be put to good use for all Canadians and people around the world. In 1994, he received the prestigious Combat Service Support of the Year Award (soldier of the year) as a member of the 1st Canadian Mechanized Brigade. Then, in 1996, he was posted to CFB Trenton, where he became an accomplished parachute instructor, jumper and rigger.

During his 30 years as a Canadian hero, he was deployed to several tours of duty. As most people know, Canada is known around the world for sending peacekeeping troops into battle-ridden parts of the world, and in 1994, Carl served in war-torn Bosnia (former Yugoslavia). He served the entire free world with his presence, by protecting those women, children and elderly who were in harm's way, more than 4,000 miles (6,500 kilometers) away from his own home and family.

In 1997, he served Canadians at CFS Alert Operation Ice Shelf, the northernmost permanently inhabited place on Earth, located 817 kilometers from the North Pole. CFS Alert is a military facility with a long history of supporting Canadian military operations, environmental research and scientific exploration in the Arctic. CFS Alert maintains signals intelligence facilities, supports search-and-rescue operations, and plays a crucial role in Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

Carl also served alongside U.S. military brothers and sisters in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in two tours of duty, first in 2006 and again in 2009. Canadian and U.S. soldiers have been serving side-by-side in world wars and other military operations for more than 100 years as separate sovereign countries, as they should and will always be.

Carl retired in 2018 as a decorated Master Warrant Officer with a chest full of medals and a heart full of love for his country, the Canadian Armed Forces, his wife, two boys – Justin and Jordan – and his extended family. Shifting his focus from his career to the community, he volunteered with the Carleton Place Minor Hockey Association, the Carleton Place Soccer Club and his boys' elementary school. In addition, Carl became even more involved in the Canadian Armed Forces Canadian Legion, playing a key role in projects that honor veterans across Canada.

I purchased the house across the street from Carl and Elizabeth in 2013, as a very small way to thank my mom for everything that she did for me in my life. This was the dream house that she had always wanted to have as a single mom, trying to raise four kids by herself in the 1960s and 1970s, as we moved from apartment to apartment on a secretary's salary.

It wasn't a few days after closing on my mom's house that Carl made the trip from across the street to welcome my mom to



CARL BELANGER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELIZABETH BELANGER

the neighborhood. After learning that she was living there with her companion, Al, both in their 80s, alone, he told her that if there was anything they needed, to just “raise the flag.” When mom relayed what he said about raising the flag, I thought that this was a unique kind of a guy, not knowing anything about him. When I finally met Carl a few weeks later, I totally got it. This was one of the rarest of people who walked the Earth who most people never come across in their lifetimes; someone who would do anything in their power to protect others. For Carl, “raise the flag” means to let him know when he is needed, and he’ll be there for you, and that is exactly what happened for the next nine years, until my mom passed away on March 12, 2022.

which describes Carl to a “T.” The fact that he did that for my mom all those years still brings tears to my eyes.

In the summertime, he would take his tractor and cut the grass. With his backhoe on his tractor, he dug out stone boulders on the back of my mom’s property to help me build a culvert at the end of my mom’s driveway. He was always there to be a great neighbor and member of the community. I can only imagine what it must have felt like for his military brothers and sisters to have Carl in a foxhole on a dark night “watching their six.”

On Nov. 11, 2016, Remembrance Day in Canada, Carl did the customary act by veterans of putting his military boots at the end of his driveway. My mom, at 82 years

ing that the dog would run away on those tiny little legs, which never happened.

When my mom passed away, I asked Carl to hold onto a few boxes of my mom’s personal items while potential buyers toured the house while it was on the market. There was no safer place in the world than being guarded by Carl, which is why I trusted him with my mom’s most treasured possessions, just as I trusted him to watch over my mom, by far the most important part of my life.

Once the house was sold, I packed up all of my mom’s household possessions, and Carl came over to help me pack the U-Haul, which he pretty much did all by himself. The



As I travelled the world acquiring and running businesses, Carl and Elizabeth – another force of nature and an Ontario Provincial Police officer herself – were always there for my mom. One of the many times that Carl was there for my mom would come when each winter snowstorm would hit. Even though I had hired a snow-removal service to keep the driveway and walkway clear, Carl would always be there with his snowplow, late at night or early in the morning, clearing the way.

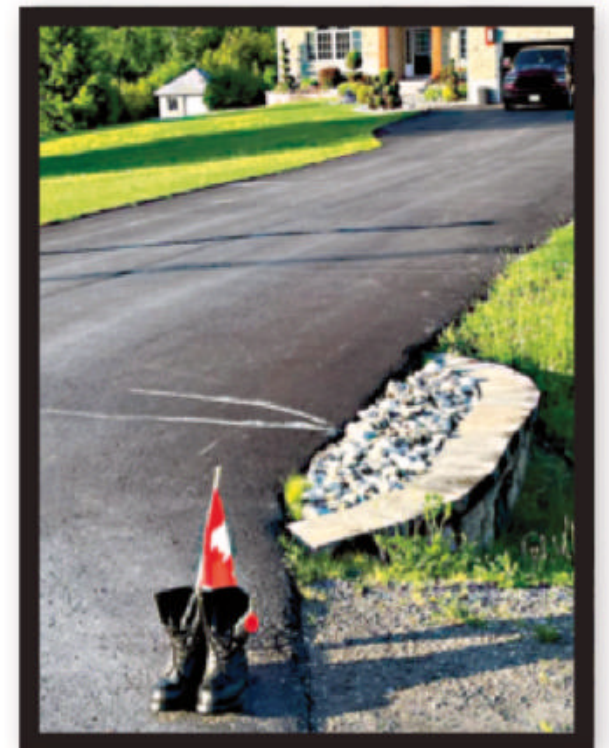
On one visit to Mom for Christmas, I saw Carl in his driveway and went over to chat. I thanked him for clearing the snow but reminded him that I pay a local company to do that, so he really didn’t have to do it. His quick response was that he wanted to make sure that, God forbid, if an ambulance had to come to my mom’s house in the middle of the night, there was a clear path for the EMS to get to my mom. Seriously, who does that? Who thinks ahead for possible dangerous situations that might arise and prepares solutions in advance? The great men and women of the military do it every day. It’s called leadership, honor, duty and service,

WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY

Belanger, top left, volunteered with the Carleton Place Minor Hockey Association as well as the Carleton Place Soccer Club.

old, saw that and took her Canadian flag from the garage, walked down her driveway, crossed the street and put her Canadian flag in his boots. Someone took a picture of his boots with my mom’s Canadian flag in them, and it went viral on social media. From that point on, it was a tradition each year for my mom to make the trip to the end of his driveway in her show of patriotism and appreciation of Carl.

As my mom’s health began to fail and she spent more and more time in bed, she could see Carl from her front window as he walked his tiny Dachshund dog, which made her laugh. Here was this gentle giant of a man weighing more than 250 pounds walking a dog that could barely weigh five pounds. She would get angry at Carl on the few occasions she would see that the dog was not on a leash. She was actually worry-



guy picked up entire sofas, beds and bureaux all by himself and carried them right into the back of the U-Haul.

On May 1, 2025 at the youthful age of 54, Master Warrant Officer, husband, partner, father, youth-hockey coach and protector of those people who need protection from across the street to across the world, Carl Belanger tragically lost his life in a boat accident in the Upper Rideau Lake near Westport, Ont.

For those nine years, I slept each night soundly as he watched over my mom from across the street. Now, I sleep in peace as he is watching over my mom in heaven. Thank you, Carl, for being my and many others’ peacekeeper and protector. **H**

W. Graeme Roustan

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13 2025 NHL DRAFT PRIMER **14** BEHIND THE MASK / JERSEY HOUND
15 DRAFT MILL-O-METER **16** COUNTDOWN: EUROPEAN DRAFT PICKS



Ravensbergen will surely go in Round 1, but, like most goalies, he probably won't see the NHL for many years.

JAMES DOYLE/PRINCE GEORGE COUGARS

NHL

PADDED PROJECTIONS

The trend of goalie-specific scouts is changing the landscape of predicting a team's future in the crease **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

GOALTENDING IS VOODOO.

It's a popular joke in hockey circles, acknowledging that it is still extremely difficult to fill the most important role on the roster because netminders can be a mysterious lot.



Some goalies can be the best in the world one year, only to lose their starting job altogether the next. Some peak early. Some peak late. But the fact of the matter is, you always need good goaltending. In the past decade, there has been a quiet revolution in scouting, where NHL teams began hiring goalie-specific scouts to analyze the position better.

When Chicago Blackhawks goalie scout Dan Ellis joined the team eight years ago, he only knew a handful of other franchises with such a scout on their roster. Now, pretty much every NHL team has one. "One of the biggest things I heard from scouts when I first started was, 'Yeah, we don't get it. We don't understand the position,'" Ellis said. "Most scouts like goalies who put up numbers, 'Hey, if he stops the puck, that's all I care about.' But are you putting up good numbers because your team is protecting you, and they're scoring six goals and only surrendering 12 shots? Or are you in a bad environment, but you're over-achieving and stealing games?"

While most talent hawks have a region they cover for their team – the OHL or Finland, for example – goalie scouts zero in on players from around the world and often cover both amateurs and pros. It's a daunting bit of travel, but

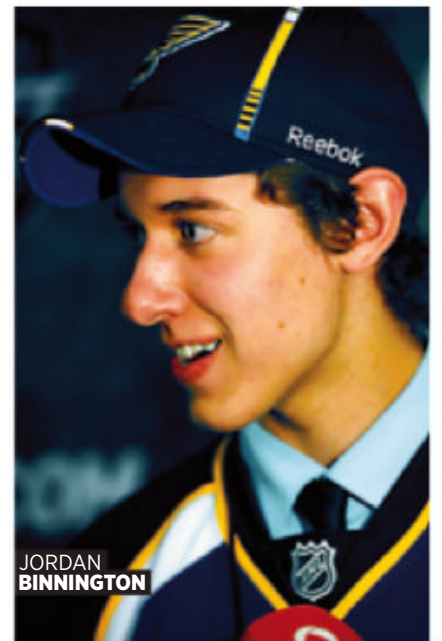
preparation helps. Ellis starts each season with a list of 50 to 60 goaltenders, aided by early international tournaments, junior drafts from previous years, Central Scouting's watch list and his own research. As the year goes on, he refines that list and makes recommendations to Chicago's head scout for viewings. Luckily for the Hawks, director of amateur scouting Mike Doneghy happened to be a stopper himself back in the day, suiting up in the NCAA for Merrimack College.

Ellis, who played more than 200 NHL games, was drafted 60th overall by Dallas in 2000. There were no goalie-specific scouts back then, but the Stars' director of amateur scouting at the time was Tim Bernhardt, a former NHL netminder with Calgary and Toronto. There are obvious advantages there, but you don't have to be born into the position to know goalies.

Utah GM Bill Armstrong made his name as a scout with the St. Louis Blues, a franchise that had a great run of goalie picks when he was director of amateur scouting. During that period, the Blues selected Jordan Binnington, Ville Husso and Joel Hofer, and Armstrong was on staff when they picked Ben Bishop and Jake Allen before that. During his playing days, Armstrong was an intimidating defenseman, so early on in his scouting career, he attended a summer goaltending school run by Brian Daccord, a former Bruins goalie coach now working for Boston University (he's also the father of Seattle Kraken goalie Joey Daccord). "It helped my scouting because I wasn't afraid to get in there and watch goaltenders and figure

them out," Armstrong said. "I believe it's up to your scouts to point the (goalie) specialists in the right direction, but I think every scout is certainly responsible to identify goaltenders in their area. There's no free pass."

It's also not as easy to get viewings on netminders compared to forwards or defensemen. "You don't even know if he's playing that night," Armstrong said. "Some of the viewings you get are flukes where you show up to the rink and the other guy is sick. Then a kid blows you out of the water and you say, 'Wow, we need to come



JORDAN BINNINGTON



back and see this guy again.' It's definitely a long road scouting goaltenders. There's a lot of effort and a little bit of luck."

Speaking of long roads, that's an important distinction with goaltenders. They're not jumping straight to the NHL like a Connor McDavid or Macklin Celebrini – it typically takes years for them to make an impact. "You look at a guy like Joshua Ravensbergen," Ellis said. "He's going in the first round, but he could take five to seven years to develop. We look at Drew Comesso, a second-round pick (in the 2020 draft for Chicago) who played for the world-junior team and U.S. Olympic

PUCKS TO PROSPECTS

Ellis is using the lessons he learned playing goal to help him evaluate future NHL netminders.

team. He's a second-year pro, and he just truly started to pop and figure it out with 14 games remaining in the season before making a nice little run in the playoffs. They take time. It's technical things. It's tactical things. It's handling adversity.

"You want to make sure they're hard workers and they have drive. On the mental side, how do you handle slumps? What do you do to get out of

them? Do you have a plan? A lot of these kids have never worked with a mental coach before, and they're getting drafted into the highest league in the world."

As one NHL exec noted, it's also important for goalie-specific scouts to pass on their analysis of a prospect's style. Sure, they might use the butterfly to great effect in junior, but are they tall enough to make it work in the NHL, or would they be better suited to a more hybrid stance? "It's such a technical position," he said. "It's important to have a base on what style the goalie is and what's expected within that structure."

And size is an important trait, especially these days when shooters are so good at picking top corners. An official NHL puck is one-inch thick, so a goalie shorter than 6-foot-1 has a significant structural disadvantage compared to his peers who are 6-foot-3 or taller. "How many NHL goalies are six-foot?" Ellis said. "You have



to be elite with your mind and your feet. Some of these guys are great in junior, but it doesn't translate to the NHL level."

Goalie scouts can't take on all the responsibility of ranking netminders, according to the exec. "Your scouts, at the end

of the day, still have to know how to evaluate a goalie because they're more likely to be building a list," he said. "So, how does that goalie fit in versus a defenseman or forward? That placement still resides with the scouting staff. Even if you're not

GOALIES TAKE TIME

Comnesso, a 2020 second-rounder, took almost two full pro seasons before he began to "figure it out."

a goalie guy, you can see compete and speed. If you combine the two, your scouts get smarter for working with a goalie-exclusive scout and learning about mechanics and technique."

But those regional and head scouts are getting a lot more help from the netminding gurus these days. When Ellis goes to a rink, he might see Clay Adams with Utah, Scott Clemmensen of the Rangers or Jordan Sigalet scouting for Calgary. When Armstrong was coming up as a talent hawk, there were simply evaluators who happened to have a knack for finding netminders. "There were certain guys back in the day who were really good," he said. "So if you saw them at the rink, you knew you were at the right game." **H**

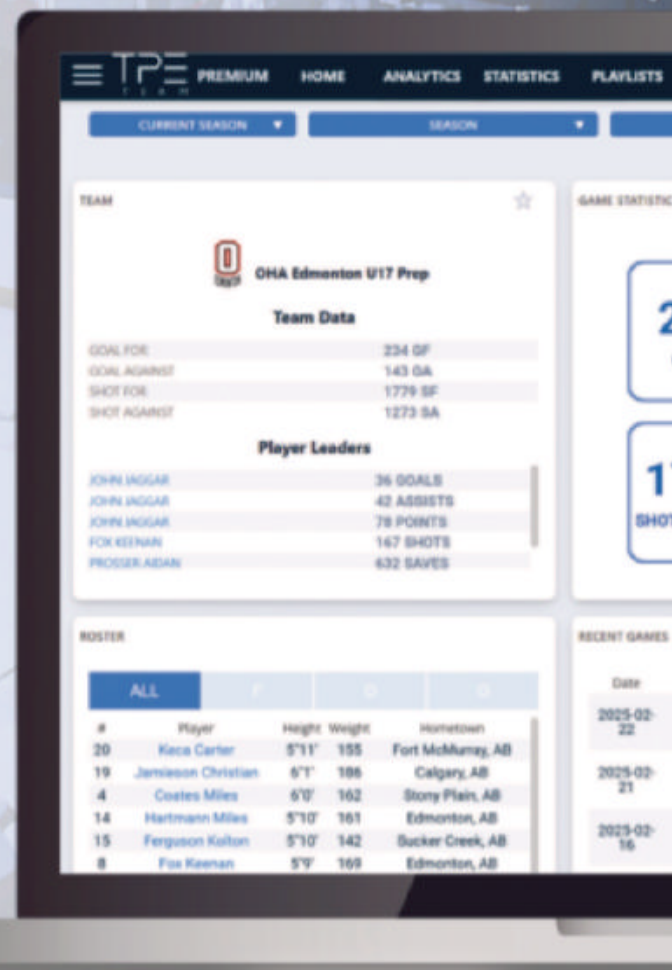
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2025

DRAFT ORDER

THE NEW YORK ISLANDERS entered the draft lottery with the 10th-best odds at the No. 1 pick, based on inverse order of the NHL standings. They cashed in on that 3.5-percent chance, earning the right to select first overall on June 27. In the second drawing, Utah moved up from 14th to the No. 4 pick, making good on a 1.6-percent chance. Picks 17 to 28 are based on the inverse order of the standings, division winners, playoff results and trades. The Cup champs pick 32nd, the Cup finalist 31st and conference finalists 29th and 30th. – **BRIAN COSTELLO**



LOCKED IN											
1		NY ISLANDERS	8		SEATTLE	15		VANCOUVER	22		PHI (COL)
2		SAN JOSE	9		BUFFALO	16		MTL (CGY)	23		NSH (TB)
3		CHICAGO	10		ANAHEIM	17		MONTREAL	24		LOS ANGELES
4		UTAH	11		PITTSBURGH	18		CGY (NJ)	25		CHI (TOR)
5		NASHVILLE	12		NY RANGERS	19		ST. LOUIS	26		NSH (VEG)
6		PHILADELPHIA	13		DETROIT	20		CLB (MIN)	27		WASHINGTON
7		BOSTON	14		COLUMBUS	21		OTTAWA	28		WINNIPEG
IN FLUX											
29		CGY (FLA)	30		PHI (EDM)	31		CAROLINA	32		SJ (DAL)

PICKS BY ROUND

THE ORDER OF SELECTION in the NHL draft in Los Angeles on June 27-28 is in flux until the end of the playoffs. Here's a breakdown of picks by round. In parentheses – both on the board above and the chart below – is the source of the team's acquired pick. Some acquired picks are conditional and may change, pending playoff results.

TEAM	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 3	ROUND 4	ROUND 5	ROUND 6	ROUND 7
Anaheim	●	● (Wpg)	● ● (Tor)	● (Bos)	● ● (Edm)	●	●
Boston	●	● (Car) ● (StL)	●	● (Phi)	●	●	●
Buffalo	●	●	●	● ● (Min)	●	●	● ● (Nsh) ● (Wsh)
Calgary	● (Fla) ● (NJ)	● (Col)	●	●	●	●	●
Carolina	●	●	● (TB)	●	●	● ● (TB)	●
Chicago	● ● (Tor)	● ● (Dal)	●	● ● (NYR)	●	●	●
Colorado	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Columbus	● ● (Min)	●	●	●	●	●	● ● (Veg)
Dallas	●	●	●	●	● ● (NJ)	●	●
Detroit	●	●	● ● (NYR)	● (TB)	●	●	● ● (StL)
Edmonton	●	●	● (StL)	●	●	●	●
Florida	●	●	●	● ● (Cgy)	● ● (SJ)	●	●
Los Angeles	●	●	●	●	●	●	● ● (Phi)
Minnesota	●	●	●	● (Tor)	● (Clb)	●	●
Montreal	● ● (Cgy)	● ● (Pit)	● ● (NJ) ● (Van)	● ● (Det)	●	●	●
Nashville	● ● (TB) ● (Veg)	● ● (TB)	●	●	●	● ● (Col)	●
New Jersey	●	● ● (Edm)	● (Veg)	●	●	● ● (SJ)	●
NY Islanders	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NY Rangers	●	●	● (Sea)	● (Ana) ● (Van)	●	● ● (Sea)	●
Ottawa	●	●	● (Fla)	● (SJ)	●	●	●
Philadelphia	● ● (Col) ● (Edm)	● ● (Ana) ● (Cgy) ● (Clb)	●	●	● ● (Car)	●	●
Pittsburgh	●	● (Wsh)	● ● (Min) ● (Ott)	●	● (Chi) ● (Min)	●	●
St. Louis	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
San Jose	● ● (Dal)	● ● (Ott)	● (Edm)	● (StL) ● (Wpg)	● (Col)	●	● ● (NJ)
Seattle	●	● ● (Tor)	●	● ● (Dal)	●	●	●
Tampa Bay	●	● (LA)	●	● (Edm)	●	●	● ● (Min) ● (SJ) ● (Uth)
Toronto	●	● (Fla)	● (Col)	●	● ● (Pit)	●	●
Utah	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Vancouver	●	●	● (SJ)	● (Ott)	●	●	●
Vegas	●	●	● (Wsh)	●	●	● ● (Wsh)	●
Washington	●	● (Bos)	● (Car)	●	●	●	●
Winnipeg	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● Team's own selection ● Acquired (from)

Behind the MASK



JAKE OETTINGER | DALLAS STARS

THE UNSUNG HEROES OF the NHL are those who work the long, hard hours that keep a big-league team ticking throughout a rigorous 82-game schedule. Rarely do the trainers, equipment managers and off-ice coaches receive the plaudits they deserve. But the efforts of those working behind the scenes are never lost on the players, and that includes Jake Oettinger. After dedicating a mask last season to the Stars' long-serving and since-retired equipment manager Steve Sumner, the Dallas goalie handed the reins for his latest helmet to the club's equipment staff. While on a road trip in New York, Dallas' Dennis Sejoert, Nick Lazor and Andrew Stegehuis came up with a Wild West-themed design that reimagines the Stars' logo as a sheriff's badge and features cowboys at the card table. And as always, 'Otter' has an otter on his new mask – this time testing his mettle at bull riding. – **JARED CLINTON**



Jersey HOUND

OKLAHOMA ST. COWBOYS | 2024-25

WHILE WE TYPICALLY FOCUS on Div. I teams in our NCAA coverage, let's not forget there are a ton of club teams out there, many from schools that are powerhouses in other sports. From a uniform perspective, American Collegiate Hockey Association squads are a gold mine, and the Oklahoma State Cowboys are a perfect example. Just check out their white jersey, anchored by their fantastic cowboy mascot, Pistol Pete, as the main logo. The school has run with Pete since 1923, so it's cool to see him on a hockey sweater, which also features an OSU shoulder logo and the school's orange-and-black color scheme. – **RYAN KENNEDY**

DRAFT MILL-O-METER

There are wells that scouts go to more often than others. Over the past 10 drafts, these six organizations have had the most players pulled from their ranks **BY JARED CLINTON**

AMERICA, PUCK YEAH



> U.S. NTDP - 128

The U.S. National Team Development Program is the most impactful talent factory in hockey, producing 11 top-10 picks since 2015, including 2019 No. 1 overall selection Jack Hughes. But no NTDP product has put up more points than **CLAYTON KELLER** the past 10 years.



LONDON BRIDGE



> LONDON KNIGHTS (OHL) - 36

For years, London has been the OHL's top prospect producer. In recent memory, the Knights have developed No. 1 picks Patrick Kane and Rick Nash. Altogether, there were 22 alumni in the NHL this season, and none was more brilliant than **MITCH MARNER**.

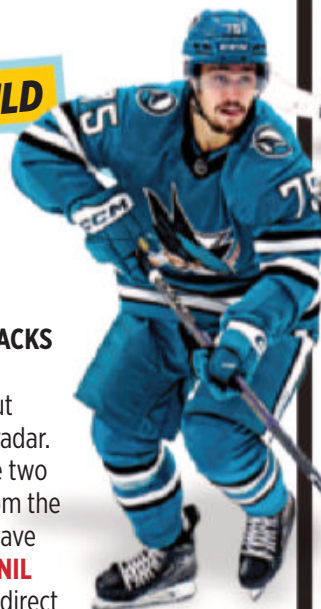


JACKS ARE WILD



> MUSKEGON LUMBERJACKS (USHL) - 24

The Lumberjacks have put plenty of players on the radar. However, only four of the two dozen players drafted from the club in the past decade have seen any NHL action. **DANIL GUSHCHIN** was the only direct Muskegon draft choice to play in the big leagues in 2024-25.

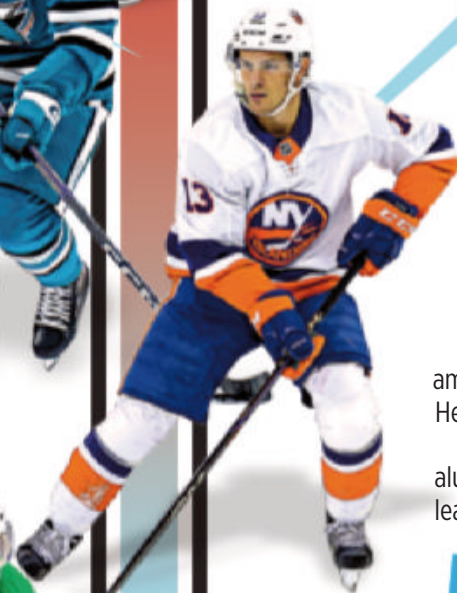


THUNDERSTRUCK



> SEATTLE THUNDERBIRDS (WHL) - 23

MATHEW BARZAL has outscored his fellow T-Birds since entering the NHL, and he's third on the all-time list among Seattle-produced picks. He has a long way to go before he catches the top-scoring alum, however. Patrick Marleau leads by more than 700 points.

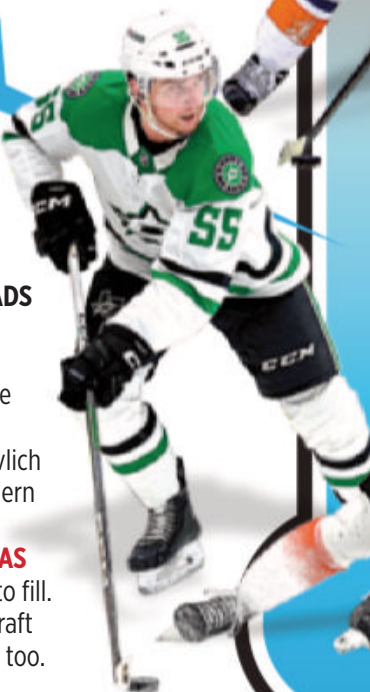


DRAFT STEEL



> BRAMPTON STEELHEADS (OHL) - 22

The former St. Michael's Majors franchise was once home to Hall of Famers Ted Lindsay, Frank Mahovlich and Gerry Cheevers. Modern Steelheads grads such as Owen Tippett and **THOMAS HARLEY** have big shoes to fill. That goes for top 2025 draft prospect Porter Martone, too.

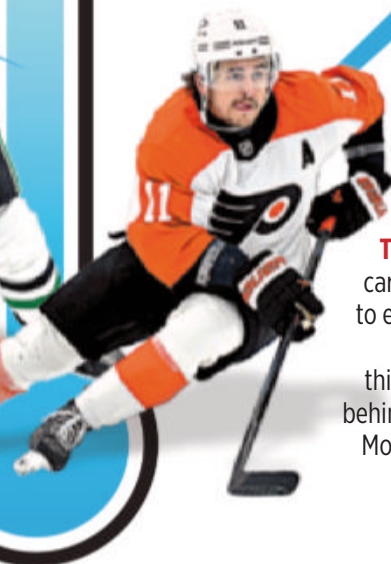


CAPITAL GAINS



> OTTAWA 67'S (OHL) - 22

TRAVIS KONECNY rode a career year to go from 13th to eighth in all-time scoring among 67's picks. He's third among active alumni, behind Tyler Toffoli and Sean Monahan. Youngster Marco Rossi is on his way.



In the CARDS

TODAY, IT WOULD BE blasphemous for any NHL player to wear No. 99, which was made famous by Wayne Gretzky during his 21-year pro career. It would also be against the rules, as the NHL retired 99 league-wide after Gretzky retired in 1999. But in the early 1980s, two other players wore that number. Rick Dudley briefly donned 99 with the Jets during the latter half of 1980-81. However, his 1981-82 O-Pee-Chee card pictures him wearing 32, his original number with Winnipeg. Wilf Paiement also rocked the double nines with the Maple Leafs from 1979 to 1982, which can clearly be seen on his 1981-82 Topps and O-Pee-Chee cards, as well as his team-issued Leafs postcard. Paiement was traded to the Quebec Nordiques toward the end of '81-82 and switched to 27. That was also the season Gretzky scored a record-high 92 goals, so perhaps no other player felt bold enough to wear 99 again. — **SAL BARRY**



THE COUNTDOWN

EURO DRAFT PICKS

Almost half of the Canes' draft picks over the past decade hail from Europe. The Ducks? Not so much **BY JARED CLINTON**

AMONG THE MAJOR NORTH American sports leagues, none has as much global flair as the NHL.

Players of 29 different nationalities have been selected in the NHL draft over the past 10 years, including those from decidedly non-traditional hockey countries. NHL teams' scouting staffs now scour high and low to find top prospects. As a result, the past decade has seen players from previously overlooked leagues have their names called on draft day. That includes skaters from the United Kingdom's EIHL, France's Ligue Magnus and the primarily Austrian and Italian AlpsHL.

The ever-expanding scouting footprint hasn't slowed the flow of talent from traditional European hockey breeding grounds, however. Sweden has steadily churned out top prospects. Likewise, Russia continues to develop uber-talented youngsters. And Finland's factory is not far behind.

Of course, North American leagues continue to be the primary source of players selected at the draft. Indeed, more than two-thirds of the prospects picked since 2015 have been from Canadian or American ranks, be it major junior, college, high school or elsewhere. But some NHL teams have shifted their strategies and are increasingly looking overseas. In this Countdown, we look at which teams have made the highest percentage of their picks from European leagues over the past decade.

1 CAROLINA HURRICANES

48.9% (45/92)

At the 2024 draft, the Canes had 10 picks. All but one selection – Justin Poirier – were playing overseas.

2 UTAH MAMMOTH

45.4% (5/11)

"Expansion" club went Euro heavy in "first" draft, but first four picks, including two in Round 1, were from N.A.

3 BUFFALO SABRES

42.9% (33/77)

The Sabres' hit rate is ugly, but plucking Rasmus Dahlin out of Sweden at first overall in 2018 was a no-brainer.

4 NEW JERSEY DEVILS

41.6% (32/77)

Aside from Jesper Bratt, the Devils' success has been limited when drafting from outside of North American circuits.

5 COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

41.5% (27/65)

The Jackets took Czech standout David Jiricek sixth overall in 2022. Two years later, they traded him to the Wild.

6 WINNIPEG JETS

38.6% (22/57)

Recent draft record is spotty, though Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov have played themselves into bit-part roles.



7 VANCOUVER CANUCKS

38.4% (25/65)

The Canucks selected two Elias Petterssons in five years, and both contributed to the NHL squad this season.

10 NEW YORK ISLANDERS

36.2% (21/58)

Across 2020 and 2021, seven of Isles' 11 selections were from Europe. They've played 12 total games in New York.

8 NEW YORK RANGERS

37.1% (26/70)

Between 2017 and 2019, the Rangers drafted five first-rounders out of Europe. Not a single one remains on the roster.

11 TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

35.6% (26/73)

Auston Matthews pre-draft season was spent in Switzerland. He's the top-scoring forward drafted from the nation.

9 DETROIT RED WINGS

36.6% (34/93)

The Red Wings have taken 25 players from Swedish leagues alone over the past decade. That's one in four picks.

12 FLORIDA PANTHERS

35.3% (24/68)

Only three Panthers picks over the past two drafts have been from major junior or college. The rest? Russia or Sweden.



MATVEI MICHKOV

13 PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

34.6% (18/52)
Pittsburgh raided Finland's junior ranks for eight picks in the past decade. Only the USHL produced more Pens draftees.

14 ST. LOUIS BLUES

33.3% (22/66)
Each of Blues' 2023 first-rounders – Dalibor Dvorsky, Otto Stenberg, Theo Lindstein – came from Swedish leagues.

15 WASHINGTON CAPITALS

32.8% (19/58)
The Capitals have drafted exactly as many WHL players in the past decade as they have those from European circuits.

16 DALLAS STARS

31.7% (19/60)
Finnish Stars outnumber Swedish mates. But since 2015, Dallas has picked 10 from the latter, five from the former.

17 VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS

31.5% (17/54)
Knights' 2021 sixth-rounder Artur Cholach played U-18 in New Jersey but spent his pandemic draft year in Ukraine.

18 MONTREAL CANADIENS

31.4% (27/86)
Habs have cast a wider net than most, drafting players from leagues in Slovakia, Switzerland, Latvia and Denmark.

19 EDMONTON OILERS

30.5% (18/59)
Two top picks in past decade, Jesse Puljujarvi and Philip Broberg, were out of Europe. Neither remains with Oil.

20 PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

29.9% (23/77)
The No. 7 pick used on Matvei Michkov in 2023 made him highest-drafted Flyer from overseas in more than 20 years.

21 COLORADO AVALANCHE

29.5% (18/61)
Milan Hejduk and Mats Sundin are Avs' only higher-scoring European draftees than recently departed Mikko Rantanen.

22 CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

29.4% (25/85)
Hawks are ninth (tied) in total European picks in past decade. However, only four of 25 have seen any big-league action.

23 BOSTON BRUINS

29.3% (17/58)
Sweden has been fertile ground for the Bruins. Boston has made 10 picks from Swedish leagues over the past decade.

24 LOS ANGELES KINGS

29.0% (18/62)
Other than Jakub Dvorak and Otto Salin, all of L.A.'s picks in the past three drafts were from North American leagues.

25 OTTAWA SENATORS

26.9% (18/67)
There have been 44 players taken out of Germany's top league. Tim Stutzle has already outscored all but three.

28 SEATTLE KRAKEN

25.0% (9/36)
Seattle has scooped five players from Finland, notably Jani Nyman. Taken 49th in 2022, he's turned heads this year.

29 TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

21.9% (16/73)
Aside from Russia, the Bolts have selected more players from U.S. high schools than Europe in the past 10 years.

30 MINNESOTA WILD

20.0% (13/65)
The Wild went to the podium eight times at 2019 draft. Not once did they select a player from a European league.



TIM STUTZLE

26 NASHVILLE PREDATORS

26.8% (19/71)
The Preds have leaned toward major-junior and college picks, but four of past five top choices from European ranks.

31 CALGARY FLAMES

18.8% (12/64)
Forget the past decade. Last time the Flames looked overseas with a first-round pick was in 2009 (Tim Erixon).

27 SAN JOSE SHARKS

25.3% (19/75)
Sharks 2015 pick Rudolfs Balcers is second in all-time NHL scoring among draftees from the Norwegian League.

32 ANAHEIM DUCKS

17.6% (13/74)
Four of Ducks' 13 Euro picks in the past 10 years were first-rounders, including 2023 No. 2 overall pick Leo Carlsson. **H**



Matthew **SCHAEFER**

"STICK TAP To Mom"

*The 2025 draft's consensus No. 1 prospect, **Matthew Schaefer**, had no trouble answering a pre-draft question that often vexes other top picks – even though he probably wishes it weren't so easy* **BY KEN CAMPBELL**

If love could have saved you, you would have lived forever. – Inscription on Jennifer Schaefer's tombstone

LEADING UP TO THE 2025 NHL draft, as part of the San Jose Sharks' due diligence, they had one of their team psychologists interview Matthew Schaefer. This was not a typical draft interview, because the psychologist was not a hockey guy and didn't know anything about the young man with whom he was speaking. He also quite obviously didn't know Schaefer's backstory.

One of the questions that almost always comes up in some form or another in pre-draft interviews involves overcoming personal obstacles and adversity. Young, successful men who've led charmed lives often have a little trouble with that one. But teams need not ask that of Matthew Schaefer, the consensus No. 1 prospect in the 2025 draft. They already know what this kid can overcome, and it has nothing to do with colliding with a goalpost at the World Junior Championship just as he was becoming the leader of Canada's defense corps.

No, it's much more than that. The pain of a busted collarbone eventually went away. The pain of a 16-year-old losing his mother to breast cancer less than three



ERIE-LY GOOD

Schaefer has set himself apart from the pack to become the consensus top prospect for the 2025 NHL draft.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD SCHAEFER





Matthew SCHAEFER

months after his billet mom with the Erie Otters died by suicide will never subside. But neither will the memories. That's what Matthew Schaefer takes comfort in now. Love could not keep Jennifer Schaefer alive, though she used it to put up one hell of a fight, but it still fills her son's heart. It's there when he says a prayer to her before every game he plays. It's there when he visits her gravesite. He usually goes alone because he doesn't want to make his father and older brother sad. And because he can't hug his mother anymore, he'll embrace her tombstone and kiss the top of it before he leaves.

Once he establishes himself as an NHLer, Schaefer wants to set up a Smilezone Foundation at the Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre in Hamilton, where Jennifer died in February 2024, just hours after Matthew asked his unresponsive mother for a kiss and miraculously got one. Supported by the Hockey Helping Kids initiative, the Smilezone Foundation will, among other things, go into a hospital and transform a waiting room or patient care or treatment room into a 'Smilezone,' equipped with bright murals, games and toys to give kids a little happiness in a place that can be scary and depressing.

Back to the phone call with the guy from the Sharks. They spoke for a time about Schaefer's journey in hockey and life, and it was fair to say the psychologist felt the impact. "He was like, 'Wow, you could be a therapist,'" Schaefer said. "With your personality, you can help guys with everything you've been through." He said, "You're handling it so well."

The hockey talent that has separated Schaefer from the rest of the 2025 draft cohort is just part of what makes him so coveted. On the ice, he's been compared to the likes of Drew Doughty and Cale Makar at the top end, but even if he doesn't reach that level, he's still a minute-munching, all-situations 'D' who excels in all areas of the



TODD, MATTHEW, JENNIFER & JOHNNY SCHAEFER

OHL IN THE FAMILY

Matthew Schaefer followed in the footsteps of older brother Johnny, who played three seasons in the 'O.'

ice. He'll captain an NHL team someday. Maybe not the Sharks, though, since the New York Islanders moved all the way up from 10th to win the right to pick at No. 1.

You want personality? Schaefer has it in boatloads. Looking for a winner? He scored the double-OT goal to give Team Ontario the gold medal at the Canada Winter Games, then led Canada to gold medals at the 2023 Under-17 World Hockey Challenge, 2024 U-18 worlds and 2024 U-18 Hlinka Gretzky Cup. He seems impervious to the pressures of going first in the draft, and, just as



TOP: MIKE COPPER/ERIE TIMES-NEWS; BOTTOM: PHOTOS COURTESY OF TODD SCHAEFER





Matthew SCHAEFER

importantly, he treats everyone from arena workers to NHL execs with equal respect.

Much of that comes from Jennifer and her husband, Todd, who instilled it in Matthew and his older brother, Johnny, from a young age. "They'd send us out on hot days to give cold water bottles to the garbage collectors," Schaefer recalled. "Holding doors open for people. If someone can't afford something at Tim Hortons, I love to get it for them. But when this happened to my mom, it puts it into perspective so much. You see people who go through stuff, but you never imagine it to be you until it is. You never in a million years would imagine it to be yourself."

And why would he? Schaefer was living a charmed life in suburban Hamilton. His mom would regularly don the goalie pads so her two sons could take shots at her. Johnny, now 27, also played in the OHL. When Johnny played minor hockey, Jennifer would often cheer him on while playing mini-sticks with Matthew. Jennifer had beaten cancer once, but even when it returned in 2023, the prognosis looked good.

Meanwhile, Matthew went first overall to Erie in the OHL draft that year and was to billet with Emily Matson, a popular local news anchor, and her husband, Ryan Onderko. Jennifer cried each day leading up to her son's departure but was put at ease when she met his billets. The day she met Emily and Ryan was the only one she didn't cry. "It was amazing," Todd said, "until it wasn't."

As Jennifer's once-optimistic prognosis became progressively more grim, Matthew



MEDAL MAN

Schaefer has taken home gold at the Canada Winter Games, Hlinka Gretzky Cup, U-17 Hockey Challenge and U-18 worlds.

was thriving in Erie. Then, one night in December, Emily Matson took her dogs for a walk and FaceTimed a friend, panning over to Matthew, whose face was covered with chocolate sauce. Not long after, she went for another walk and was struck by a train. The coroner ruled her death a suicide. A little more than two months later, Schaefer got the call to come home after his mother had taken a turn for the worse. Until then,

TOP+LEFT: PHOTOS BY BRANDON TAYLOR; RIGHT: PHOTO BY SHEA BERENCSI



Schaefer was the top pick in the 2023 OHL draft and thrived in Erie before a broken collarbone ended his sophomore year.

“I think he’ll excel in all areas. He’ll be a power-play guy. He’ll be a penalty-kill guy. He’ll be on in the last five minutes

– NHL scout on Matthew Schaefer

Jennifer attended almost every Otters game, covered in a blanket to keep from getting too cold and catching a virus. But one weekend, with Erie playing in nearby Brantford, she wasn’t there. She tried to watch the game online but didn’t make it through before falling asleep, which had never happened before.

Three days after that game, Matthew was at her bedside saying his final goodbye. “She fought so hard,” Schaefer said. “You wish you could change it. Sometimes, I get so sad, just wishing she could be here. Just another hug or a chance to go to dinner with her. Just to give her one more big hug and a kiss.”

Before the Hlinka Gretzky Cup final last August, Schaefer visited his mom’s grave

and chatted with her. “I told her, ‘Mom, I’m going to go win this tournament for you,’” Schaefer said. “‘I know you can’t be here with me right now, but I know you’re going to be with me, so I’m going to work super hard and make you proud, and we’re going to go and win.’” With the ‘C’ on his chest, he helped Canada to a 2-1 win over Czechia to claim gold. He was the anchor of a blueline that allowed just four goals in five games. It would’ve only been three had the Czechs not scored with nine seconds to go in the final. That came just months after, as an under-ager, Schaefer won gold at the U-18 worlds.

So it was no surprise Canada chose Schaefer for their squad at the 2025 WJC,

despite the fact he had just turned 17 and would be one of the youngest players in the 2025 NHL draft. (And even though, as if he hadn’t dealt with enough, he contracted mono after the Hlinka Gretzky, which kept him out of training camp and the first nine games of the OHL season.)

Among the litany of reasons Canada did so poorly at the WJC was that they couldn’t replace Schaefer after he drove the net and collided with the goalpost with his left shoulder against Latvia in the second game of the event. On Canada’s very first goal of Game 1, Schaefer took a pass from Oliver Bonk, then shook off Bonk, who was tapping his stick for a pass back. Instead,



Matthew SCHAEFER



STYLE GUIDE

Schaefer says his unique fashion sense was inspired by – and pays tribute to – his late mother, Jennifer.

end. And as it turned out, that was the beginning of the end.

The fractured collarbone required surgery, and it kept him out for the remainder of the season. Had he not been injured, Schaefer would've been part of Team Canada again in the spring. Not for the U-18 worlds – though he was still eligible to play there – but for the senior men's World Championship. "I got an X-ray quickly at the arena, and I was like, 'Please don't let it be broken. Let me go back out there and play,'" Schaefer said. "But they were like, 'No. You're done.' I couldn't even move my shoulder. I felt like I was going to throw up. It hurts, right?"

The injury is not expected to affect Schaefer's draft status. In a year where the draft "is just OK," according to talent hawks, other prospects did not do enough to change most scouts' minds about Schaefer. In Schaefer, they see a defenseman with decent size but with elite skating and

“My whole style is a stick tap to my mom”

– Matthew Schaefer

hockey sense in all three zones, both with and without the puck. He might not be an elite point producer in the NHL, but his ability to do everything will be his strength at the next level. "Sometimes, when you say a guy is an all-round defenseman, it kind of minimalizes them," said one scout. "But I think Schaefer will excel in all areas, and he'll be good offensively. He'll be a power-play guy. He'll be a first penalty-kill guy. And he'll be on the ice in the last five minutes of the game, no matter the situation."

That is also exactly how Schaefer describes his own game. He loves the comparisons to the likes of Doughty and Makar, but he tries to take a little bit from each of the players he watches and fold in as much as he can from each of them into his game.

One thing is certain: the young man cuts a dashing figure both on and off the ice. When things started getting real, and he had to dress up for his games, Schaefer called on his mother to be his wardrobe consultant. And that's why, for every game, he eschews the shirt-and-tie look for a snappy turtleneck with a sports jacket. In the winter, he rocks a pea coat, and he doesn't plan on changing things anytime soon, except on draft day, when he'll play it safe and go with the standard shirt-and-tie look. "My whole style is a stick tap to my mom," he said.

And make no mistake, Jennifer will be there on draft day. When Schaefer is taken, it will evoke a flood of memories for him, his father and his brother. "She'd be crying and filled with a lot of emotion," Schaefer said. "It brings back old memories of her driving me to hockey at seven in the morning, and she'd have my tracksuit ready and would make me a great breakfast. She'd get me all pumped up, and, no matter what, I was coming in with a great game speech from my mom." **H**



PHOTOS BY ERIE OTTERS



PHOTO BY BRANDON TAYLOR



Michael **MISA**



Misa MAKING HISTORY

Michael Misa's production has him sitting with some elite company, and the totals alone would make him a top-end prospect. But the intangibles could have some teams thinking he's worthy of the No. 1 pick **BY TONY FERRARI**

CONNOR MCDAVID, John Tavares, Mitch Marner and Patrick Kane. Those are the names that surround Saginaw Spirit captain Michael Misa in the OHL's all-time record books.

"It's pretty crazy, and I haven't really thought about it until just now," Misa said. "Hearing my name in the same light as those guys is what you always dream of as a kid." In the past three decades, the only draft-

eligible OHLer to rack up more points than Misa's 134 was Kane with 145. Misa matched the former London Knights star as a goal-scorer, finding the net 62 times this season. What makes Misa's accomplishment even more impressive is that Kane was a late birthday, meaning he was 18 for the vast majority of the season whereas Misa didn't turn 18 until Feb. 16.

Misa led the CHL in scoring and finished second in goals behind 19-year-old Nick Lardis, a third-round pick of the Chicago Blackhawks in 2023. Misa was also a diverse offensive threat, notching 72 assists, the fourth-highest total in the OHL.

When Misa entered the OHL after being granted exceptional status, expectations were sky high. He was just the eighth player to be given early access into the CHL and the sixth in the OHL. "I've gone through a lot in Saginaw," Misa said. "I've had some really great individual success, and we won the Memorial Cup last year, but I've also dealt with some injuries, and I've grown up here."

Misa's rookie season was cut short by a broken tibia, but he had been on pace to break Tavares' record for most points by an exceptional-status player (77). In 45 games, Misa finished with 1.24 points per game, ahead of fellow exceptional-status recipients Tavares (1.18), Shane Wright (1.14) and McDavid (1.05).

Misa went from being a fixture near the top of the lineup in his rookie year to a middle-six scorer as a sophomore, with Saginaw loading up for a Memorial Cup run. But he didn't let his ego get the best of him. He accepted the role and embraced being a part of something potentially special. And he was rewarded for it. The Spirit won their first Memorial Cup on home ice. The last-minute game-winning goal and the celebration that ensued is something he will always hold dear. "I don't even remember what happened," he said. "I just remember what it felt like in the moment. I blacked out and just felt so happy for all of the guys on that team. It was a special group."

The championship gave Misa plenty of confidence heading into the biggest year in his young career. In the off-season, he focused on getting healthy, stronger and becoming a more vocal leader for a team that was set to see several veterans depart. Misa wanted to fill the void as a leader on and off the ice. He wanted to provide the same kind of guidance for the younger guys that players such as Josh Bloom and Braden Hache had given him.

It wasn't long before everyone, from the players to the coaching staff to the management team, realized that Misa had elevated his game and matured into the leader they



needed. “The way he’s handled himself on the bench, in the gym and in the dressing room, he’s been phenomenal and a natural fit,” said coach Chris Lazary in January when Misa was given the captaincy.

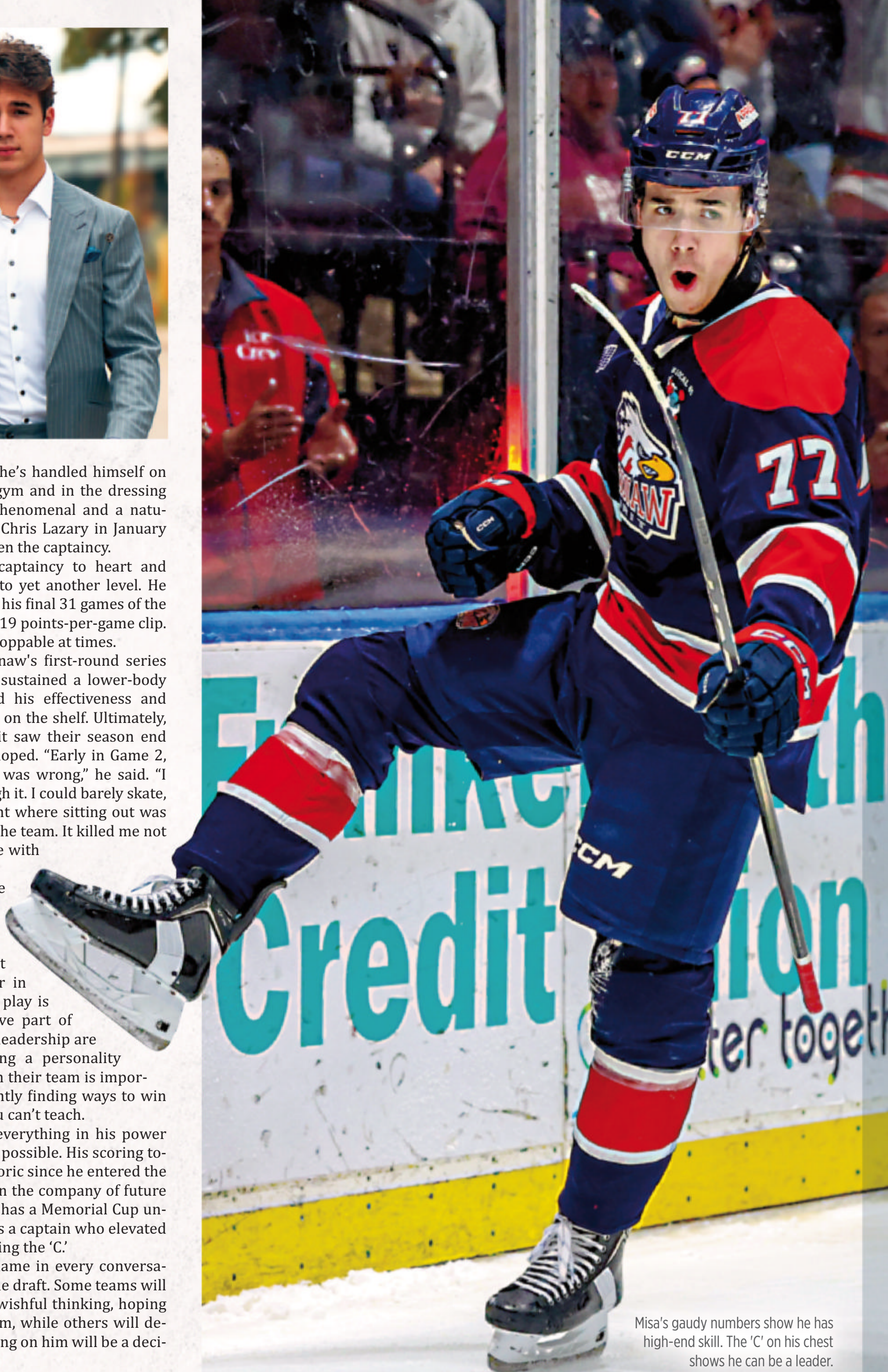
Misa took the captaincy to heart and brought his game to yet another level. He put up 68 points in his final 31 games of the year, scoring at a 2.19 points-per-game clip. He was nearly unstoppable at times.

But during Saginaw’s first-round series against Erie, Misa sustained a lower-body injury that limited his effectiveness and eventually put him on the shelf. Ultimately, Misa and the Spirit saw their season end earlier than they hoped. “Early in Game 2, I knew something was wrong,” he said. “I tried to play through it. I could barely skate, and it got to a point where sitting out was what was best for the team. It killed me not to be out on the ice with my guys.”

As they prepare for the draft, NHL teams and their scouts have checklists for what they’re looking for in a prospect. On-ice play is obviously a massive part of it. Work ethic and leadership are key factors. Finding a personality that will mesh with their team is important. And consistently finding ways to win is an intangible you can’t teach.

Misa has done everything in his power to check every box possible. His scoring totals have been historic since he entered the OHL, putting him in the company of future Hall of Famers. He has a Memorial Cup under his belt. He was a captain who elevated his game after getting the ‘C.’

Misa will be a name in every conversation at the top of the draft. Some teams will be in the camp of wishful thinking, hoping that he falls to them, while others will debate whether passing on him will be a decision they regret. **H**



Misa’s gaudy numbers show he has high-end skill. The ‘C’ on his chest shows he can be a leader.



Michael **MISA**

MICHAEL MISA vs.

BY KEN CAMPBELL

YOU COULD ARGUE THAT the best thing for Michael Misa and James Hagens would be to switch places next season. After Misa scored 62 goals and 134 points in his third season with the OHL's Saginaw Spirit, he has nothing left to prove in junior hockey and could very well suffer a major case of boredom next season. Playing college hockey would challenge him against more mature players. Hagens has been lights-out on the international stage and was a standout at Boston College, but he might do well in a program where he could shine as an individual and rack up a ridiculous number of points.

Because, at least as far as scouts are concerned, neither of the talented forwards is ready to play in the NHL in 2025-26. But when they are, they should both develop into major impact players. Here's how they stack up in key areas of the game:

SKATING

ONE SCOUT COMPARED MISA and Hagens to Formula 1 cars in that they both know when to speed up and slow down and how to get around the corners. Both are terrific skaters, but Hagens might have a little more flat-out speed. And although Misa is tough to contain when he gets going, Hagens has an agility element that makes him difficult to collar. "To me, Hagens has a better burst, better separation, and he's more elusive with the puck," said one scout. "He borders on dynamic going east-west and stopping and starting, some of those subtleties in skating. It's not to denigrate Misa. It's just one guy is better." **EDGE: HAGENS**

COMPETE LEVEL

NEITHER MISA NOR HAGENS has made it to the top of the draft class without having a high level of compete. "They're both what I call quiet hard competitors," said one scout. "You're not pushing either one out of the game." One scout said the reason Hagens doesn't go to the dirty areas as much as Misa is because his skill allows him to find open spaces. But you don't lead all scorers at the U-17 and U-18 worlds and win gold medals at the U-18 worlds and WJC without being competitive. "They both want the puck on their stick, and they want to make a difference," said another scout. "And they do make a difference. They make their teammates better." **EDGE: EVEN**

DECEPTION

MORE THAN A FEW scouts have watched both players and have been expecting them to do one thing, only to see them throw their opponents off by doing something completely different. Misa has a higher level of hockey sense. He will look like he's offering the puck only to take it back, while Hagens has the potential to give opponents more fits with his capacity to stop and start. "Hagens has an ability to stop and get guys leaning, change speeds to back guys off, make it look like he's going to attack and have them back off," said one scout. "He has one more dimension to his deception than Misa does." **EDGE: HAGENS**

MICHAEL
MISA



MISA: PHOTO BY SAGINAW SPIRIT



JAMES HAGENS



JAMES
HAGENS

CLUTCH PERFORMANCE

INJURY AND A RUN to a Memorial Cup championship kept Misa out of the past two world under-18s, and Canada left him off the roster for the 2025 WJC. Hagens, meanwhile, won gold medals at both the U-18s and world juniors. It should be noted that, at the OHL Cup in 2022, Misa gained exceptional status for the OHL draft by dominating the tournament and breaking Connor McDavid's scoring records. Hagens is three months older and beat Misa at the 2022 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge.

EDGE: HAGENS

SHOT

YOU MIGHT BE INCLINED to go with the guy who scored 62 goals this year, but scouts believe this is closer than many think. It's a little more difficult to get into the scoring areas in college hockey than it is in major junior, so Hagens didn't have as much of an opportunity to display his shooting skills. "Misa's shot is more accurate, and he picks his spots better," said one scout. "Misa gets it off in traffic better. He's able to shoot through sticks, where Hagens has to create that space and then zing it."

EDGE: MISA

PASSING

THE CONVENTIONAL THINKING IS that Misa is the better shooter and Hagens the better set-up man, but they just go about their business in a different way. After all, Misa did dish out 72 assists this season. Playing on a line with Ryan Leonard and Gabe Perreault, Hagens had more passing options at Boston College. "Hagens might be a shade more creative off a move, but Misa has wider vision and is a little more aware of layers," said one scout. "Hagens does it more off a rush or a move."

EDGE: EVEN

STICK SKILLS

MISA IS A BIGGER, stronger player than Hagens, so he's a little stronger on his stick, which allows him to be better in traffic and protect the puck more, but scouts believe Hagens is a little slicker with his stick. "Hagens has quicker hands, and he's a little shiftier," said one scout. "The puck comes off his stick just a little bit quicker. A little bit better touch, a quicker stick and the ability to do the same moves at a little higher speed."

EDGE: HAGENS

GOAL HUNGER

YOU KIND OF HAVE to give it to the guy who had 62 goals this season, right? That said, Hagens would've had more goals this year had he played in the OHL. Even though Hagens has good net instincts, Misa is more willing to go into areas where scoring goals is difficult. "Misa scores more goals because of where he plays and how he plays," said one scout. "I would say Misa is much more puck hungry, which gives him a big benefit."

EDGE: MISA

WOW FACTOR

ONE SCOUT SAID HAGENS falls somewhere between Jack Hughes and Trevor Zegras, two players who can dazzle. One of the differences might be linemates. Hagens had chances to make high-end plays because of Perreault and Leonard, while Misa was more on his own. "When Hagens does something, it's a little cooler and more 'X-worthy,'" said a scout. "That doesn't mean Misa doesn't have those plays, but there's a little more 'wow' factor with Hagens. I'm not sure it makes you better in the end."

EDGE: HAGENS



Anton **FRONDELL**

*Thanks in large part to his poise both on and off the ice, **Anton Frondell** shone this season to become one of the draft's most sought-after prospects* **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

Balance BEAM

THE MOST IMPORTANT series in Swedish hockey history may have just happened this year, when Djurgarden and AIK faced off in the Allsvenskan final with the winner earning promotion to the SHL.

Both teams hail from Stockholm, and both are around 130 years old. The fact that neither was in the top tier was wild, but now, one would triumph at the expense of the other. It was as if the New York Yankees and New York Mets had both inexplicably dropped down to AAA and had to battle it out to see who would get back to the majors. Djurgarden ended up winning the series, sending a flood of partisans onto the ice with 17-year-old center Anton Frondell, the top-rated European player in the 2025 NHL draft. "When we won the last game, they all jumped onto the ice, about a thousand people," Frondell said. "It was crazy. It was chaos, and I was somewhere in the middle. It was a really fun moment."

It's been an eventful year for Frondell, and the experience he gained in Djurgarden's run to promotion cannot be understated. "We call it the 'Subway Series' because fans from both teams could take the subway to

the games," said Claes Elefalk, Frondell's agent. "They share an arena, and all seven games were played there. Many people said this was the most important series in Swedish hockey history because these are the two biggest and oldest clubs in Sweden."

But Frondell didn't stick around to celebrate for long. After the victory, he jetted to Texas to suit up for Sweden at the world U-18s, where he helped the Tre Kronor earn a silver medal. It was the caper to a roller coaster of a year for the talented 6-foot-1, 198-pound center, who missed most of the summer due to injury and played at the World Jr. A Challenge instead of the world

juniors. But in the second half, once healthy, Frondell caught fire with Djurgarden. Now, his draft stock is looking better than ever.

Part of the reason for that is Frondell didn't get down when he was out of the lineup. His knee was the problem in the summer, but his last injury involved his thumb, so he could still train. "I wasn't frustrated or stressed," he said. "It was more just boring not to play games. The games are the fun part, and that's why you train and do all the other stuff. But I knew I would be back, and I could still do a lot of training without pain, so I worked on so many things to get better. That was my focus the entire time. I don't



OTTO MARAND/DIF HOCKEY



think I lost anything during that period. It was just a time for me to work on strength training in the gym and shooting pucks all day. I knew I could still do something good."

With his powerful game and wicked shot, Frondell made a positive impression on many scouts this year, and they'll undoubtedly enjoy his personable off-ice side when they interview him at the draft combine in June. "I've been doing this for 30 years, and I must say Anton Frondell is a very balanced person," said Elefalk,

TITLE TEENS

Youngsters Frondell and Eklund played significant roles in helping Djurgården get promoted back to the SHL.

whose past clients included Mats Sundin and the Sedin twins. "It's rare to see a youngster have such a balance in his whole approach to the sport. He has great support from his family...They let their kids play whatever they liked and supported them. It's very nice for me to see how they handle everything. They are extremely

humble people. Just wonderful."

The Frondells are an interesting bunch, too. Dad Henrik is an architect who designed and built the house Anton and sister



I wasn't frustrated or stressed. It was more just boring not to play games

– Anton Frondell

Alva first grew up in south of Stockholm in Trångsund (the family now lives nearby in Farsta). Meanwhile, mom Maria works at a boutique chocolate shop in Stockholm. The shop is so renowned that it is the official confectioner for the King of Sweden, and its other clients include the Nobel Foundation (as in the Nobel Peace Prize). "It's not a big factory," Frondell said. "It's just a little shop in the middle of Stockholm. But I try not to eat too much chocolate. I'm better now than I was when I was a kid. I'm serious about what I eat."

Henrik is also a good tennis player, but he couldn't get Anton into it as a youngster. "I went two or three times, but I was so shy when I was younger," Frondell said. "There was a drill where you put a ball on your racket and walk 20 meters – that was it. But I was too shy to do it in front of the others."

Henrik then put Anton into hockey, thinking it would have his son racing back to the tennis courts. Instead, Anton found his calling, and the racket was permanently replaced with a composite stick. "Anton is



Anton FRONDELL



super focused, and he has the engine in himself,” Elefalk said. “No one has to push him. He has enough engine to drive him to reach his dream.”

FrondeLL recently signed a two-year extension with Djurgarden, and he’ll face even better competition next year in the SHL. As it was, he put up an impressive 25 points in 29 games this season, plus another seven in 16 playoff games. All this despite the injuries and starting the year in junior, where Frondell was happy to go to get the ice time he needed. “He has a great shot, vision and technique,” said Djurgarden coach Robert Kimby. “So when he showed us he was ready, it was a no-brainer. For a couple of weeks, he was carrying our team along with

TRE KRONER DELAY

Though Frondell didn’t make the cut for the WJC, he suited up for Sweden at the world under-18s.

The fact that Frondell was able to contribute as much as he did is a testament to his skill set. He’s a powerful kid who plays a team-friendly two-way game, and

he can really wing the puck. His favorite NHLer to watch is also a good role model. “I always answer Aleksander Barkov in Florida,” Frondell said. “He’s a big, strong guy who protects the puck and wins his battles. He’s an all-around player who drives the



“He wasn’t just thinking about producing; he was doing everything he could to help the team win” – Robert Kimby

(fellow 2025 draft prospect) Victor Eklund and a couple other guys. And when the post-season came, he played playoff hockey. He wasn’t just thinking about producing; he was doing everything he could to help the team win. He’s a mature guy and very calm. The success he had in the second half, he earned it. He put himself in that situation.”

power play, and when he’s on the ice, everybody gets better. And he’s a center, which is what I want to be.”

Even with the two-year contract extension, Frondell still could leave for the NHL during that span if he’s ready. Kimby will put him in a position to succeed, assuming he’s back with Djurgarden, and the coach

would love to see a replay of this season’s progress. Maybe by then, what Frondell and his teammates accomplished this season will have finally sunk in. “I’m a young player,” he said. “I’m 17, and being a part of that journey, that long playoff run, I still don’t think I understand how big it was for the team and for me.” **H**

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Jackson Smith keeps getting better and better, and a late-season surge could push the Tri-City Americans defenseman into the top half of the first round **BY CAROL SCHRAM**



Steady RISE



TAKE A QUICK glance at one of Jackson Smith's headshots, and you wouldn't be faulted if you thought you were looking at a photo of a young Chris Pronger.

Smith has the same sort of dirty-blond flow, wide-set blue eyes and a lopsided grin that hints at potential mischief. He doesn't share Pronger's gap between the front teeth, though. Like many kids, Smith endured a couple of years of braces during middle school.

The Calgary-born defenseman doesn't quite measure up to Pronger's 6-foot-6 frame, either – but he's still an imposing figure. Clocking in at 6-foot-3 and 195 pounds after turning 18 in May, Smith was already well over the six-foot mark when Tri-City picked him second overall in the WHL's 2022 draft, right after Medicine Hat took wunderkind Gavin McKenna.

Even before the railroad tracks went on his teeth, Smith was building up his lung capacity in the pool at Calgary's Glencoe Club. Backstroke and breaststroke were his favorite races, from the sprints right up to 400 meters. And swimming turned out to be a transferrable skill. "The cardio really helps for hockey, just being able to play a lot of minutes and not really get very tired," he said. "Also, strength-wise, my shoulders developed a lot faster at a younger age because of it."

Smith came up through Calgary's

TRIAL PERIOD

Smith got into six games with the Americans in 2022-23 before making his full-time debut the next season.

Edge School hockey program. In 2022-23, he won a Canadian Sport School League U-18 championship and also played his first six WHL games with Tri-City.

In 2023-24, he put up 29 points in 62 games and was named the

Americans' rookie of the year. Then, in 2024-25, Smith established himself as a mainstay for Tri-City, playing big minutes as the only player on the team to dress for all 68 games. "He was our top 'D,' really, all season long," said Tri-City coach Stu Barnes. "We kept seeing him take another step and another step, and just when you kind of think, 'OK, this may be it,' he's able to elevate even more."

This year, Smith's emphasis was on improving his defending and his 200-foot game. "I've learned to read the play a lot better," he said. "I've worked on when to go and when not to go. I've also improved my defensive game. I've gotten better in the defensive zone and being able to make the first pass and break out."

As they say, good defense leads to offensive opportunities, which came in bunches late in the season. With five goals and eight points in his final five games, he was named the WHL's player of the week in late March. Nine of his 11 goals came in the last 11 games, including two overtime-winners. Smith's 54 points also led all 2007-born WHL defensemen. "He didn't have a ton of goals throughout the regular season," Barnes said. "Then, all of a sudden, everything



Jackson SMITH

clicked for him, and he started to get rewarded.”

Given how he plays, it should come as no surprise that Smith’s defensive idol is Dallas Stars stalwart Miro Heiskanen. “Smitty has those qualities,” Barnes said. “He’s not going to physically dominate anybody, but he skates so well and has such a good stick and reads the play so well, much like Miro.”

Growing up in Calgary, Smith cheered for his hometown Flames. He also had a soft spot for Patrick Kane in his ‘Show-time’ era with the Chicago Blackhawks – which indirectly led to him wearing No. 7 for Tri-City. “When I was, I want to say, 10 years old, my grandpa bought me a Chris Chelios No. 7 Chicago Blackhawks jersey because I love the Blackhawks,” Smith said. “He found it at a garage sale for, like, \$5.”

From Jackson’s and older brother Marshall’s earliest days on skates, their grandparents have been there to support them. When Smith hit the ice at the Saddledome to face the Hitmen for the first time in January 2024, his cheering section was massive. “I had, like, 100 friends and family there watching me, so it was super cool,” Smith said. “Knowing that I’ve been to that rink 50 times or more to watch the Flames play – or the Hitmen – getting to play there was a pretty surreal experience for me.”

Last summer, Smith also set up camp for two weeks at another NHL barn. He was named



“Getting to play there was a pretty surreal experience

– Jackson Smith on playing at the Saddledome

to Canada’s 2024 Hlinka Gretzky Cup squad and helped the team bring home a third consecutive gold medal at the event by taking down Czechia in the championship game at Rogers Place in Edmonton.

In April, after Tri-City was knocked out of the first round of the WHL playoffs by the Victoria Royals, Smith donned the maple leaf again and made his first trip to Texas for the 2025 U-18 worlds.

PRONGER-LITE

Though the size and smile may differ, Smith still strikes a similar picture to the Hall of Fame defender.

Now, draft preparation begins in earnest. That includes targeted time with a trainer to get in peak condition for the draft combine in Buffalo in June and making travel plans to head to Los Angeles later that month for the draft itself. Though NHL teams won’t be sending their full staffs to California under the league’s new decentralized draft format, potential first-rounders need to be ready to shake commissioner Gary Bettman’s hand after he announces their names, then put on their teams’ jersey and make the media rounds.

With a capacity of 7,100, the Peacock Theater at L.A. Live will still allow players to be surrounded by family, friends and others who are important to them on a day that they’ll remember for the rest of their lives.

And even though the draft event has been downsized, the pressure and scrutiny that the top prospects face remain as intense as ever. In November, a new showcase opportunity was introduced: the two-game CHL/USA Prospects Challenge in London and Oshawa, Ont. As a member of Team CHL, Smith came out on the winning side.

When NHL Central Scouting released its final 2025 draft rankings in mid-April, Smith ranked 13th among North American skaters and fifth among North American D-men. “Our coaching staff spent a lot of time with him, with video and things like that, and he was always very receptive to it,” Barnes said. “It’s pretty exciting for a guy to be as skilled and as talented as he is and then be ready to learn and launch and grow.”

While the scouts were circling, the media was asking for his time and pro teams were trying to assess his character, Smith said he heeded the advice he received from his coach: to be where his feet are and stay in the moment.

Barnes’ words carry significant weight



PHOTOS BY TRI-CITY AMERICANS



“It’s pretty exciting for a guy to be as skilled and as talented as he is and be ready to learn and launch and grow

– Tri-City coach Stu Barnes

because he walked the walk himself. He’s a fellow Albertan, hailing from Spruce Grove, and was selected fourth overall by the Winnipeg Jets in 1989 before going on to compete in 1,136 NHL games across 16 seasons and between five organizations.

Thirty-six years later, the volume has been cranked up to 11 on the hype that envelops every future star, thanks to the cottage industry of video scouts and draft-ranking analysts who are quick to share their opinions online. Barnes says Smith

has stayed cool and kept a level head.

“In the long run, whatever happens ends up happening,” Smith said. “Throughout the year, it was always a thought of, ‘Do whatever I can for the team, and then, individually, it’ll all come together.’” **H**



Nashville **PREDATORS**

REID
SCHAEFER

FEDOR
SVECHKOV

TANNER
MOLENDYK

Facing the

IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS, you're only as good as your last hit. But after the Nashville Predators climbed the charts – errr, standings – with a franchise-record point streak that helped earn first-year coach Andrew Brunette a Jack Adams nomination in 2023-24, this season's follow-up effort could only be called a Music City flop.

GM Barry Trotz was widely praised for winning free agency last summer when he brought in Steven Stamkos, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei. But when the new additions joined the mix, the end result was decidedly out of tune.

At his end-of-season media conference in early May, Trotz faced the music. "I think I was the one who said it's fantasy hockey until you become a good team," he said. "We didn't become a good team, unfortunately. You wanted to thread the needle, bring in accomplished veterans that we could mix in with our younger talent. We worked hard to acquire those players, and that plan is still in place."

After starting the year with five straight losses, the Predators couldn't manifest another moment like the 'U2 at the Sphere' cancellation that galvanized them and propelled them to a 2024 play-off berth. As their results continued to disappoint, the organization

SCHAEFER: MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL; SVECHKOV: ALAN POIZNER/MAGN IMAGES; MOLENDYK: ANNE-MARIE SORVIN-USA TODAY SPORTS



EGOR
SURIN

The Predators paid big money for big-name UFAs last summer, only to stagger and stumble through a lost season in 2024-25. The good news? There are prospects and picks aplenty in Nashville, and the kids are already pushing for playing time **BY CAROL SCHRAM**

MUSIC

elected to accelerate the timeline for some of the team's younger players and prospects.

That talent pool is overseen by Jeff Kealty, the team's assistant GM and director of scouting. He was pleased that both of the Preds' 2021 first-rounders, center Fedor Svechkov and left winger Zachary L'Heureux, earned meaningful minutes on the big club after starting the year with the AHL's Milwaukee Admirals.

"Centermen are hard to come by," Kealty said. "(Svechkov) probably played even more than we would have projected this year based on injuries late in the season and what-have-you. He's a really good

up-and-coming player, plays a good two-way game, and he's only going to get bigger and stronger. Zach L'Heureux already made some impact in terms of the on-the-edge game that he has. That's part of what makes him effective."

In just his second season in North America, Svechkov carved out a full-time NHL roster spot by January and finished with 17 points in 52 games with the Predators. L'Heureux was summoned after just four AHL games in October. He finished with 15 points in 62 games – and kicked off 2025 with his first appointment with the NHL's department of player safety, after he received a match penalty for a



Nashville PREDATORS



slew-foot that injured Minnesota Wild captain Jared Spurgeon on New Year's Eve (he was suspended for three games).

Historically, Nashville has given its prospects plenty of time to mature in Milwaukee before they make the jump to the NHL. After Svechkov and L'Heureux, the next wave to emerge from America's Dairyland could include 2022 first-rounder Joakim Kemell and a pair of trade acquisitions – pesky Ozzy Wiesblatt, a 2020 first-rounder who was picked up from San Jose a year ago, and power forward Reid Schaefer, a 2022 first-rounder who was part of the return in the 2023 Mattias Ekholm trade with Edmonton.

After Schaefer put up 14 points in his first 19 games, his second season in Milwaukee ended in early December due to a shoulder injury that required surgery. Kealty remains high on the 6-foot-5, 226-pound left winger. “You could really see the stuff that he had taken from one year to the next,” Kealty said. “He’s another guy that was a young pro the year before, and it took him a little bit to get adjusted. But the second half of last year and the beginning of this year, you could see this big powerful

COMING SOON

Surin, the Preds’ first-round pick in 2024, spent the year in the KHL and won the Gagarin Cup championship.

tive 2026 No. 1 overall draft pick Gavin McKenna and Wiesblatt’s younger brother, Oasiz, a crafty but undrafted center who scores in bunches. Oasiz joined his brother in the Predators organization after signing an AHL deal with Milwaukee in late April.

After seeing Molendyk push for a roster spot in the past two training camps, Trotz expects the same this fall. The GM is also looking forward to seeing more from Matthew Wood, the 15th pick overall from 2023 who got into six games at the end of this season after a strong junior NCAA campaign with the University of Minnesota. “I was really impressed with him,” Trotz said. “It’s a big, big jump, but he did very well in terms of the pace. His length was good. He made those little plays that looked more like an NHLer than a college kid.”

Nashville’s draft class of 2024 is also looking strong. First-round draft pick Egor Surin spent most of his season on the main roster for Lokomotiv Yaroslavl in the KHL, gaining valuable experience and scoring goals as his team won the Western Conference and then took home the Gagarin Cup.

Second-rounder Teddy Stiga had a strong freshman campaign at Boston College and carved his place in history when his overtime golden goal gave Team USA their first



BRADY SKJEI
& STEVEN STAMKOS

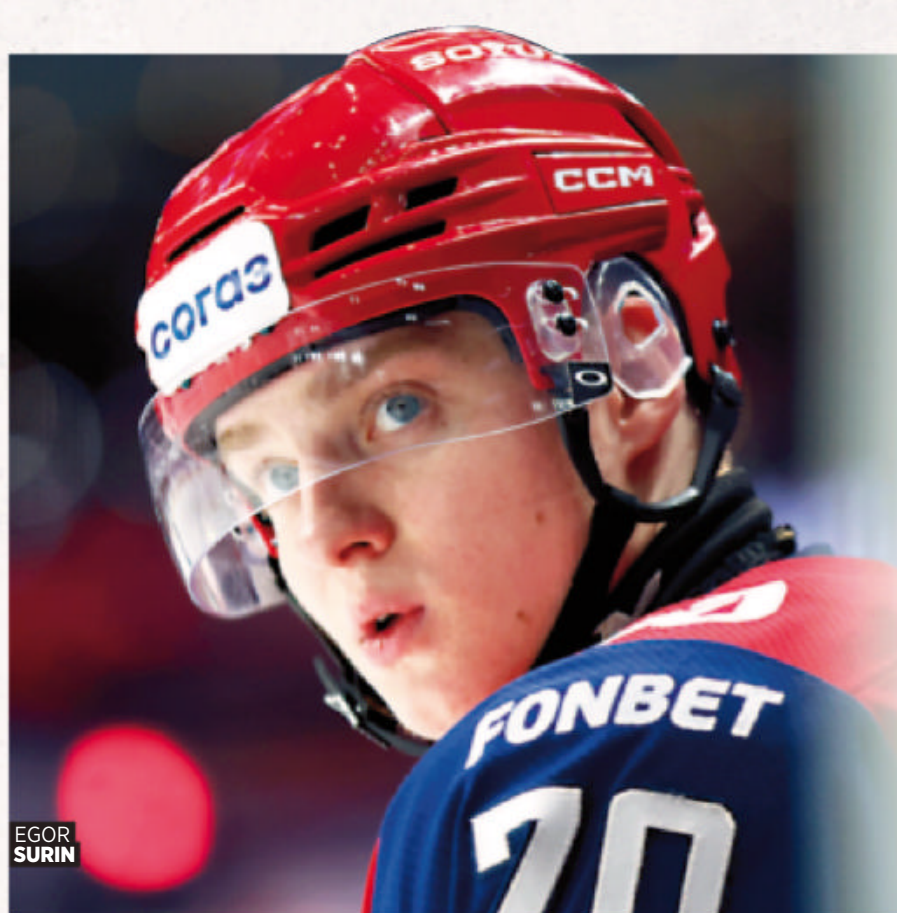
“I think I was the one who said it’s fantasy hockey until you become a good team” – Nashville GM Barry Trotz

guy. He skates really well and is a very intelligent player. He’s going to open some eyes next year when he comes in.”

Nashville’s best prospect at the junior level is stud defenseman Tanner Molendyk, drafted with Edmonton’s 2023 first-round pick from the Ekholm deal. After two solid playoff runs with the Saskatoon Blades, the 20-year-old was dealt to the powerhouse Medicine Hat Tigers for his final WHL post-season, where he has played with presump-

back-to-back titles at the World Junior Championship.

Before this season, the Predators had missed the playoffs just four times in the past 20 years. So, they’ve built out their prospect pool without many high draft selections. They’ve never picked higher than second overall, when they drafted David Legwand after they came into the league in 1998. Franchise icon Pekka Rinne was an eighth-round pick in 2004, and his succes-



sor, Juuse Saros, was taken in Round 4. Roman Josi and Shea Weber, who each wore the 'C' while patrolling the blueline in Nashville, were second-round picks. So Nashville's current cache of draft capital is somewhat unprecedented. At season's end, the team held 10 picks in the 2025 draft, including three first-rounders, plus nine more picks in each of 2026 and 2027.

After the Preds finished 30th in the league standings, luck was not on their side at the draft lottery. Wins by the New York Islanders and Utah pushed Nashville down from third overall to fifth, but Kealty still sees an opportunity to improve his club.

"There's a good variety of players," he said. "I say this all the time, and you can go back and look at any draft, there's always

AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Svechkov, a first-round pick in 2021, ended up earning a full-time role with the Predators late this season.

players to be found. That's the job of the scouting staff, and our guys are working real hard at that."

Like many Predators players, Kealty rose up to his current position via Milwaukee. After winning two Hockey East titles in four seasons on the blueline at Boston University, the 6-foot-4 defenseman signed with the brand-new Predators for the 1998-99 season and spent his first pro year with Milwaukee, which was then in the IHL. A pre-season concussion ended his playing career at just 23 in 1999. Kealty returned to Nashville as an amateur scout

2023, after a 15-year run as Nashville's first coach. So, it's not surprising that, despite the challenges of this season, Trotz has elected to stand by Brunette, who Trotz coached on the Predators in their first season, then handpicked to run the bench.

"I was Andrew Brunette, way back when," Trotz said. "I thought I had a lot of tools in my tool belt, and you find out you have to add a couple more. Good young people, when you believe in them, just like a good, young player, you stick with them."

After stealing the free-agency spotlight last year, Trotz expects to keep a lower profile this summer. Beyond the draft, his to-do list includes coming to contract terms with 23-year-old RFA winger Luke Evangelista

"There's always players to be found. That's the job of the scouting staff, and our guys are working real hard at that"

– Jeff Kealty, Nashville assistant GM & director of scouting

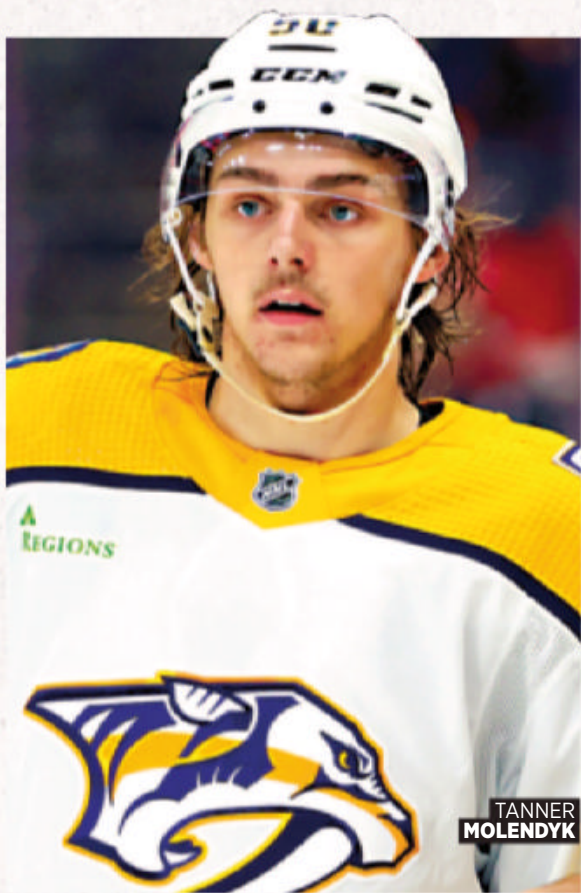
once his symptoms finally cleared. That was in 2001. He has climbed the management ranks ever since.

In 2007, Kealty became Nashville's director of amateur scouting. Then, in 2018, he rose to director of scouting and assistant GM. This spring, he also got his first call from USA Hockey since playing at the WJC in 1996 – to head up the front office as GM for the World Championship.

Loyalty is a hallmark of the Predators' organization, where David Poile sat in the GM's chair for 26 years and still serves as a senior advisor. Trotz succeeded him in

and looking for "hockey trades," like the one that brought Michael Bunting to Music City in March.

Next season, Trotz is looking for significant on-ice improvements – especially when it comes to Nashville's 5-on-5 play. And while he says the team's culture is strong, more brutal honesty is required in the dressing room and from the coaching staff. "We have really good guys," Trotz said. "Sometimes, maybe too nice. Sometimes, you don't want to step on each others' toes. I can be a nice guy, but I know when I don't have to be a nice guy." **H**





TWN DRAFT RANKINGS

This year's draft will literally be a Jacked-up affair. Here are the top 100 prospects according to a panel of NHL scouts **BY BRIAN COSTELLO**

WHEN A TEAM DRAFTS a "Jack" on June 27 or 28 at the Peacock Theater in L.A., they better make sure they announce the pick clearly. Otherwise, they might get the attention of 10 to 15 various prospects.

To say that this year's NHL draft is Jacked up is an understatement. No fewer than five Jacks are considered solid prospects ranked by Central Scouting. Jack Nesbitt, Jack Murtagh and Jack Ivankovic are all ranked within our top 100, while Jack Brauti and Jack Pechar are later-round hopefuls. Add in Jackson Smith, Jackson Crowder and Jaxon Fuder and this year's theme is pretty clear.

And if things get noisy, you might get Jake

O'Brien, Jake Crawford, Jakob Ihs-Wozniak, Jacob Rombach, Jacob Cloutier or Jacob Kvasnicka thinking they were picked when "Jack" or "Jake" is called. Let's just hope Atte Joki doesn't get fooled by any of this.

The Hockey News' top 100 ranking was compiled by editor in chief Ryan Kennedy, in consultation with more than a dozen NHL scouts, none of them named Jack. Profiles were written by Kennedy and Ken Campbell. 'Best Case' comparisons were assembled by Tony Ferrari.

Let's hope the mic is working well on draft day and the Jacks are heard loud and clear. Be warned, though, three notable prospects from the USHL Muskegon Lumberjacks will surely get the call, too. **H**

- 1** **MATTHEW SCHAEFER**
D, ERIE (OHL)
- 2** **MICHAEL MISA**
C, SAGINAW (OHL)
- 3** **PORTER MARTONE**
RW, BRAMPTON (OHL)
- 4** **JAMES HAGENS**
C, BOSTON COLLEGE (HE)
- 5** **ANTON FRONDELL**
C, DJURGARDEN (SWE.2)
- 6** **CALEB DESNOYERS**
C, MONCTON (QMJHL)
- 7** **VICTOR EKLUND**
LW, DJURGARDEN (SWE.2)
- 8** **ROGER MCQUEEN**
C, BRANDON (WHL)
- 9** **KASHAWN AITCHESON**
D, BARRIE (OHL)
- 10** **JACKSON SMITH**
D, TRI-CITY (WHL)
- 11** **JAKE O'BRIEN**
C, BRANTFORD (OHL)
- 12** **BRADY MARTIN**
C, SAULT STE. MARIE (OHL)
- 13** **BRAEDEN COOTES**
C, SEATTLE (WHL)
- 14** **RADIM MRTKA**
D, SEATTLE (WHL)
- 15** **CARTER BEAR**
LW, EVERETT (WHL)
- 16** **LOGAN HENSLEY**
D, WISCONSIN (BIG TEN)
- 17** **CAMERON REID**
D, KITCHENER (OHL)
- 18** **LYNDEN LAKOVIC**
LW, MOOSE JAW (WHL)
- 19** **MALCOLM SPENCE**
LW, ERIE (OHL)
- 20** **JACK NESBITT**
C, WINDSOR (OHL)
- 21** **JUSTIN CARBONNEAU**
RW, BLAIN.-BOIS. (QMJHL)
- 22** **IVAN RYABKIN**
C, MUSKEGON (USHL)
- 23** **JAKOB IHS-WOZNAK**
LW, LULEA JR. (SWE.)
- 24** **MILTON GASTRIN**
C, MODO JR. (SWE.)
- 25** **CULLEN POTTER**
LW, ARIZONA STATE (NCHC)
- 26** **JOSHUA RAVENSBERGEN**
G, PRINCE GEORGE (WHL)
- 27** **BEN KINDEL**
C, CALGARY (WHL)

28	COLE RESCHNY	
	C, VICTORIA (WHL)	
29	BILL ZONNON	
	C, ROUYN-NORANDA (QMJHL)	
30	SHANE VANSAGHI	
	RW, MICHIGAN STATE (BIG TEN)	
31	HENRY BRZUSTEWICZ	
	D, LONDON (OHL)	
32	CAMERON SCHMIDT	
	RW, VANCOUVER (WHL)	
33	BLAKE FIDDLER	
	D, EDMONTON (WHL)	
34	WILLIAM MOORE	
	C, U.S. NTDP	
35	JACK MURTAGH	
	LW, U.S. NTDP	
36	SIMON WANG	
	D, OSHAWA (OHL)	
37	VOJTECH CIHAR	
	LW, KARLOVY VARY (CZE.)	
38	EDDIE GENBORG	
	RW, LINKÖPING (SWE.)	
39	LUCA ROMANO	
	C, KITCHENER (OHL)	
40	ERIC NILSON	
	C, DJURGÅRDEN JR. (SWE.)	
41	WILL HORCOFF	
	C, MICHIGAN (BIG TEN)	
42	JACOB ROMBACH	
	D, LINCOLN (USHL)	
43	RYKER LEE	
	RW, MADISON (USHL)	
44	MATTHEW GARD	
	C, RED DEER (WHL)	
45	THEO STOCKSELIUS	
	RW, DJURGÅRDEN JR. (SWE.)	
46	BEN KEVAN	
	RW, DES MOINES (USHL)	
47	VACLAV NESTRASIL	
	RW, MUSKEGON (USHL)	
48	TOMAS POLETIN	
	LW, PELICANS JR. (FIN.)	
49	ZACHARY MORIN	
	LW, SAINT JOHN (QMJHL)	
50	COLE MCKINNEY	
	C, U.S. NTDP	
51	KURBAN LIMATOV	
	D, DYN. MOSCOW JR. (RUS.)	
52	CHARLIE TRETHEWEY	
	D, U.S. NTDP	
53	KRISTIAN EPPERSON	
	LW, SAGINAW (OHL)	
54	VIKTOR KLINGSSELL	
	LW, SKELLEFTEA JR. (SWE.)	

55	SASCHA BOUMEDIENNE	
	D, BOSTON UNIVERSITY (HE)	
56	THEODOR HALLQUISTH	
	D, ÖREBRO JR. (SWE.)	
57	ADAM BENAK	
	C, YOUNGSTOWN (USHL)	
58	ALEKSEI MEDVEDEV	
	G, LONDON (OHL)	
59	PEYTON KETTLES	
	D, SWIFT CURRENT (WHL)	
60	PYOTR ANDREYANOV	
	G, K.A. MOSCOW JR. (RUS.)	
61	CONRAD FONDRAK	
	C, U.S. NTDP	
62	LUCAS BECKMAN	
	G, BAIE-COMEAU (QMJHL)	
63	FRANCESCO DELL'ELCE	
	D, UMASS (HE)	
64	MASON WEST	
	C, EDINA (USHS)	
65	BRANDON GORZYNSKI	
	C, CALGARY (WHL)	
66	DANIIL PROKHOROV	
	RW, DYN. ST. PETER JR. (RUS.)	
67	DAKODA RHEAUME-MULLEN	
	D, MICHIGAN (BIG TEN)	
68	TYLER HOPKINS	
	C, KINGSTON (OHL)	
69	JACK IVANKOVIC	
	G, BRAMPTON (OHL)	
70	MAX PSENICKA	
	D, PORTLAND (WHL)	
71	HAYDEN PAUPANEKIS	
	C, KELOWNA (WHL)	
72	SEAN BARNHILL	
	D, DUBUQUE (USHL)	
73	LASSE BOELIUS	
	D, ASSAT JR. (FIN.)	
74	ETHAN CZATA	
	C, NIAGARA (OHL)	
75	MACEO PHILLIPS	
	D, U.S. NTDP	
76	JAN CHOVAN	
	C, TAPPARA JR. (FIN.)	
77	NATHAN BEHM	
	RW, KAMLOOPS (WHL)	
78	OWEN GRIFFIN	
	C, OSHAWA (OHL)	
79	DAVID BEDKOWSKI	
	D, OWEN SOUND (OHL)	
80	FILIP EKBERG	
	LW, OTTAWA (OHL)	
81	ALEXANDER ZHAROVSKY	
	RW, UFA JR. (RUS.)	



LASSE BOELIUS

82	CARLOS HANDEL	
	D, HALIFAX (QMJHL)	
83	EVAN PASSMORE	
	D, BARRIE (OHL)	
84	MICHAL PRADEL	
	G, TRI-CITY (USHL)	
85	REESE HAMILTON	
	D, REGINA (WHL)	
86	CARTER AMICO	
	D, U.S. NTDP	
87	MANS GOOS	
	G, FARJESTAD JR. (SWE.)	
88	LUKA RADIVOJEVIC	
	D, MUSKEGON (USHL)	
89	KARL ANNBORN	
	D, HV71 JR. (SWE.)	
90	ATTE JOKI	
	C, LUKKO JR. (FIN.)	
91	MATIAS VANHANEN	
	LW, HIFK JR. (FIN.)	
92	SEMYON FROLOV	
	G, KRYL. SOVETOV JR. (RUS.)	
93	LOUIS-ANTOINE DENAULT	
	G, QUEBEC (QMJHL)	
94	CAEDEN HERRINGTON	
	D, LINCOLN (USHL)	
95	EMILE GUTE	
	LW, CHICOUTIMI (QMJHL)	
96	MASON MOE	
	C, MADISON (USHL)	
97	ALEX HUANG	
	D, CHICOUTIMI (QMJHL)	
98	LEV KATZIN	
	RW, GUELPH (OHL)	
99	TRENTEN BENNETT	
	G, KEMPTVILLE (CCHL)	
100	OLIVER TURNER	
	D, ST. ANDREW'S (CAHS)	

1



MATTHEW SCHAEFER

BORN Sept. 5, 2007, Hamilton, Ont.
2024-25 Erie (OHL)
POS D **HT** 6-2 **WT** 183 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 1 (NA skaters)

➤ **HE STARTED THE** season with mono and ended it with a broken collarbone, but in between, Schaefer established himself as the consensus No. 1 prospect in the 2025 NHL draft. In fact, if he is chosen first, he will have played the fewest games in his draft year of any No. 1 overall pick in modern draft history.

Schaefer's skating and hockey IQ are elite, and there is a sense of calm when the puck is on his stick. "He's an exit machine," said one scout. "He can skate it out or pass it out, and he has the ability to control the play. I've never seen a team disintegrate the way Canada did after he got hurt in the world juniors."

Projections for Schaefer range from Rasmus Dahlin on the low end to Cale Makar on the high end, but the general view is that he excels at everything. "He's above average to very good in every area you would rate a guy," said another scout. "I don't think he's as dynamic as Makar, but he's really well-rounded in all areas. I think his skating puts him in the elite category."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Hamilton	U15	31	17	34	51	14
'22-23	Halton	U16	25	12	20	32	14
'23-24	Erie	OHL	56	3	14	17	16
'24-25	Erie	OHL	17	7	15	22	8
	Canada	WJC	2	1	1	2	0

BEST CASE: Roman Josi

2



MICHAEL MISA

BORN Feb. 16, 2007, Oakville, Ont.
2024-25 Saginaw (OHL)
POS C **HT** 6-1 **WT** 184 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 2 (NA skaters)

➤ **PLAYING IN HIS** third OHL season after being granted exceptional-player status at 15, Misa has given scouts a lot of time to both admire and pick apart his game. There's never been any doubt about Misa's ability to score – he might have the most dangerous shot in the draft – but scouts are impressed that he's added texture to his game. "I was concerned going into this season whether he was one-dimensional: 'If he doesn't score, what does he do?'" said one scout. "And I think his all-around game has really taken a step. His 200-foot game is much better. And he went from being this quiet kid who just put up points to yelling at guys on the bench for being soft defensively."

This season is the first in which Misa had the chance to be a full-time center, and that's where scouts project him at the NHL level. Misa will fill a long-term need for any team seeking offensive punch. "He has that ability to hold the puck and use it as a carrot to opponents, and he puts it back to where he wants to get the puck," said another scout.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Miss. Senators	U16	27	16	27	43	14
'22-23	Saginaw	OHL	45	22	34	56	10
	Canada Red	WU17	7	3	3	6	0
'23-24	Saginaw	OHL	67	29	46	75	26
'24-25	Saginaw	OHL	65	62	72	134	45

BEST CASE: Jack Eichel

3



PORTER MARTONE

BORN Oct. 26, 2006, Peterborough, Ont.
2024-25 Brampton (OHL)
POS RW **HT** 6-3 **WT** 208 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 6 (NA skaters)

➤ **IF YOU NEED** a distillation of Martone's game, just watch the first-ever OHL Top Prospects Game this season. The power forward notched a Gordie Howe hat trick in the all-star showdown, with the goal coming as the OT-winner. "He's a skilled guy who can play it any way you want," said one scout. "He's physical, he's hard to get away from the net, and he has great hands in close. He gets a lot of goals in a lot of different ways. He can handle it himself 1-on-1, or he can jam the net."

Martone has a hockey pedigree thanks to his dad, Mike, who was a bruising OHL D-man drafted by the Buffalo Sabres. Porter also found more consistency as the season progressed. "Some games, you would see his physicality," said another scout. "Some games, you would see his hockey sense and play with the puck. But he put the whole package together and has the potential to be the quintessential power forward. The nice thing is his skating still needs to be cleaned up a bit, which will be no issue once he gets bigger and stronger."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Tor. Jr. Cdns	U16	53	41	63	104	-
'22-23	Sarnia/Miss.	OHL	61	19	16	35	57
'23-24	Mississauga	OHL	60	33	38	71	63
'24-25	Brampton	OHL	57	37	61	98	74
	Canada	WJC	3	1	0	1	2

BEST CASE: Matthew Tkachuk

4



JAMES HAGENS

BORN Nov. 3, 2006, Hauppauge, N.Y.
2024-25 Boston College (HE)
POS C **HT** 5-10 **WT** 177 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 3 (NA skaters)

➤ **GOING INTO THE** season, many scouts projected Hagens to be the No. 1 pick. And while he didn't disappoint, he fell a bit after a slightly underwhelming offensive year. But perhaps that can be forgiven given the quality of NCAA competition. "If Hagens had played in the OHL for London or Kitchener, would he not have scored 55 or 60 goals?" said one scout. "The problem I have with Hagens, though, is that he's an undersized, incomplete player. Is he going to be Logan Cooley? If not, a lesser Logan Cooley is not as exciting."

Centering a line with Ryan Leonard and Gabe Perreault, Hagens showed he could dish the puck – though he might have deferred too often. Size is also a concern, but scouts recognize there's room in the NHL for sub-six-foot players if they think the game at the level Hagens does. "You just wish he were a little bit bigger," said another scout. "You can be pretty confident he's going to create offense. He's performed everywhere he's been, and he'll perform in the NHL, too."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Mt. St. Charles	U15	54	54	61	115	-
'22-23	USA U17	NTDP	43	26	40	66	38
'23-24	USA U18	NTDP	58	39	63	102	34
'24-25	Boston College HE		37	11	26	37	24
	USA	WJC	7	5	4	9	2

BEST CASE: Jack Hughes

5



ANTON FRONDELL

BORN May 7, 2007, Trangsund, Swe.
2024-25 Djurgården (Swe.2)
POS C **HT** 6-1 **WT** 198 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 1 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **WHAT STARTED OFF** as a disaster turned into a triumph as Frondell overcame early adversity to have a fantastic draft year. He missed most of the summer due to injury, then came out of the lineup twice in the first half due to a couple of other maladies. Playing internationally in December helped his return. "It was a good decision going to the World Jr. A Challenge," said one scout. "It's fun to see him at center. I like his approach to the game. He's big, strong and plays hard. He has a good shot, plays a smart game, and he's very team-friendly. There's a natural power to his game."

Frondell's second half was punctuated by a scoring tear against pros in the second-tier Allsvenskan and peaked when he helped Djurgården earn promotion back to the SHL in the post-season, which was huge for the legendary Stockholm club after two failed tries in as many years. "He's a big, strong, powerful two-way center," said another scout. "He's got the big one-timer on the power play, and I see a middle-six center all day long."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Djurgården	U16	31	31	25	56	45
'22-23	Djurgården	U18	34	19	25	44	6
'23-24	Djurgården	Jr.	29	18	21	39	16
'24-25	Djurgården	Swe.2	29	11	14	25	16
	Sweden	WU18	5	1	2	3	0

BEST CASE: Robert Thomas

6



CALEB DESNOYERS

BORN April 11, 2007, St-Hyacinthe, Que.
2024-25 Moncton (QMJHL)
POS C **HT** 6-1 **WT** 178 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 7 (NA skaters)

➤ **NOT ONLY WAS** Desnoyers one of the top regular-season scorers, he finished second in playoff points while leading Moncton to a QMJHL title. Yes, he was playing for a powerhouse team, but Desnoyers was also a major reason why the Wildcats were such a force. "He's a smart 200-foot player with really good details in his game," said one scout. "He's getting a ton of ice time with the best team in the league, which tells you something. He plays in all situations, big minutes and against top lines almost every night. I don't know if there are many guys in the draft as well-rounded as him. He's a guy you'd want to have on your team."

And that's not limited to Moncton. Desnoyers was also a coach's favorite at the CHL-NTDP series. "I love him," said another scout. "He brings a little bit of everything, from leadership to compete, hockey sense and skill. He might be closer to his ceiling than his floor right now, but I don't see anything keeping him from playing in the NHL and being part of a winning culture."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Ecole Fадette	U15	26	19	27	46	34
'22-23	St-Hyacinthe	U18	42	23	30	53	44
'23-24	Moncton	QMJHL	60	20	36	56	26
	Canada	WU18	5	1	4	5	8
'24-25	Moncton	QMJHL	56	35	49	84	39

BEST CASE: Dylan Strome

7



VICTOR EKLUND

BORN Oct. 3, 2006, Stockholm, Swe.
2024-25 Djurgården (Swe.2)
POS LW **HT** 5-11 **WT** 161 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 2 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **THE YOUNGEST** member of Sweden's world-junior squad, Eklund was also one of the most effective players on the team, using his motor and skill to put up six points in seven games. Continuing on the theme of playing above his age, Eklund also helped Djurgården earn promotion up to the SHL from the Allsvenskan. "He plays so hard every shift," said one scout. "He plays with passion, and he competes. He wants to get inside. He plays with energy, and he wants to play fast. There's just a little more projection with Eklund than with Frondell in terms of when he adds weight and how his game translates."

True, the size isn't ideal, but he has a pedigree as the younger brother of San Jose's William Eklund, and the results are the results. "You want him to be a little bigger, but he continues to prove size isn't a deterrent for him, so trust what you see," said another scout. "He's got skill, determination, good pace, and he can play on the wall. At the end of the day, he plays bigger than he is, and he'll fill out in time."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Djurgården	U18	30	21	20	41	44
'23-24	Djurgården	Jr.	30	7	18	25	26
	Djurgården	Swe.2	15	1	3	4	6
'24-25	Djurgården	Swe.2	42	19	12	31	37
	Sweden	WJC	7	2	4	6	2

BEST CASE: Jesper Bratt

8



ROGER McQUEEN

BORN Oct. 2, 2006, Saskatoon, Sask.
2024-25 Brandon (WHL)
POS C **HT** 6-5 **WT** 197 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 8 (NA skaters)

➤ **PLAYERS GET** injured in their draft years all the time. The problem for McQueen, however, is that some teams could be scared off by the fact that Cayden Lindstrom, the No. 4 overall pick in 2024, didn't play until the WHL final this year after also missing a good chunk of his draft year. Lindstrom has a back issue, and it's suspected McQueen has something similar. "Ability-wise, he's top-five, potentially even top-three," said one scout. "With the injury, and being on the heels of Lindstrom not playing, I expect him to slide."

That could benefit a team willing to take a risk. When McQueen did play, he was a monster. "The first thing you notice is his size," said another scout. "He skates extremely well for a big guy, and he can be elusive, especially when he has the puck. He hunts down pucks, drives the net and has a good shot. You can tell he's a leader by the way he plays, so there's character, too."

Weighing injury concerns against the tantalizing package makes McQueen the true X-factor of the first round.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Sask. Stallions	U15	4	9	18	27	2
'21-22	Sask. Blazers	U18	41	24	37	61	54
'22-23	Brandon	WHL	55	4	10	14	26
'23-24	Brandon	WHL	53	21	30	51	50
'24-25	Brandon	WHL	17	10	10	20	40

BEST CASE: Tage Thompson

9



KASHAWN AITCHESON

BORN Sept. 21, 2006, Toronto, Ont.
2024-25 Barrie (OHL)
POS D **HT** 6-1 **WT** 196 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 9 (NA skaters)

➤ **COMING INTO THE** season, Aitcheson looked like a nasty, physical blueliner. He was indeed that this year, but he also exploded offensively, putting up nearly a point per game on a strong Colts team. “He’s a gamer,” said one scout. “This guy is very physical. He loves to join the rush and the attack. He can play in every type of game. He can be competitive and physical or be active and offensive. He has a great attitude toward the game. If you go to see him, he’s easy to find. He leads with compete and effort, and those are likeable traits.”

NHL teams also love Aitcheson off the ice, seeing him as a great interview with a good family behind him. “Last year, I thought he was a high-energy kid who competed his butt off and had some skill,” said another scout. “He’s the same kid now, but what I really like is he’s calmed his game down, and he’s not running around. He’s playing such a smarter game. Originally, you could say he’d be top six. Now, you say top four or maybe even top pairing.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	North York	U16	47	9	22	31	-
'22-23	Barrie	OHL	23	1	2	3	35
'23-24	Barrie	OHL	64	8	31	39	126
	Canada	WU18	7	1	2	3	2
'24-25	Barrie	OHL	64	26	33	59	88

BEST CASE: Jacob Trouba

10



JACKSON SMITH

BORN May 13, 2007, Calgary, Alta.
2024-25 Tri-City (WHL)
POS D **HT** 6-3 **WT** 195 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 13 (NA skaters)

➤ **HE'S NOT THE** most offensive defenseman in the draft nor the most physical, but Smith has shown enough flashes of both attributes to get scouts excited about his potential. “At the end of the day, after some growing pains, you’re going to get a really good skating, defense-first guy with better-than-average transition and skill,” said one scout. “He’s a very good skater, and he can wire the puck in stride. What you’ll see in the NHL is that he’ll tease you with his offense, but it never quite comes to the fore.”

There is a lot to like about Smith’s all-around game, but he must be better in his own end. He has good size and strength and will improve once he adds more consistency to his game. “He’s one of those guys you can draft and just plug in and say, ‘OK, we’re good for 12 years,’ ” said another scout. Smith projects as a top-pairing ‘D’ at the NHL level. He logged big minutes in all situations in Tri-City and finished tied for second in ice time among draft-eligible CHL defensemen this season.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Edge School	U15	29	15	23	38	52
'22-23	Edge School	U18	16	5	4	9	28
'23-24	Tri-City	WHL	62	8	21	29	41
'24-25	Tri-City	WHL	68	11	43	54	48
	Canada	WU18	7	4	1	5	4

BEST CASE: Thomas Harley

11



JAKE O'BRIEN

BORN June 16, 2007, Toronto, Ont.
2024-25 Brantford (OHL)
POS C **HT** 6-2 **WT** 172 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 4 (NA skaters)

➤ **COMING OFF A** monster rookie year in the OHL, O'Brien set a high bar for himself in his draft campaign. But he still managed to impress. “He’s a very cerebral player,” said one scout. “He varies his attack, he’s very creative, and he’s a great playmaker who can finish. He’s always on the right side of the puck and plays well with and without it. He’s very good defensively, and he’s a top-end, elite talent offensively. Once he fills out, he’s going to be a very good player. At least a No. 2 center in the NHL.”

O'Brien earned Team East MVP honors at the OHL Top Prospects Game in front of his home fans in Brantford. He was also the OHL’s rookie of the year last season. Even then, he may still be underrated. “He’s in the Wyatt Johnston mold that thinks the game well,” said another scout. “He’s very elusive, but he’s not going to run you over. He’ll steal pucks by lifting sticks or jumping pass routes. He’s a guy who people will say, ‘You picked *that* guy over him?’ in a few years. He has that potential.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Tor. Jr. Cdns	U15				DNP	
'22-23	Tor. Jr. Cdns	U16	34	16	17	33	6
'23-24	Brantford	OHL	61	13	51	64	10
	Canada Red	WU17	7	0	1	1	4
'24-25	Brantford	OHL	66	32	66	98	18

BEST CASE: Nick Suzuki

12



BRADY MARTIN

BORN March 16, 2007, Elmira, Ont.
2024-25 Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)
POS C **HT** 6-0 **WT** 178 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 11 (NA skaters)

➤ **IN SOME WAYS,** Martin is a throwback to the old-school NHL. The kid grew up on a farm in small-town Ontario, where his gym routine was whatever was needed to maintain the family’s cattle herd. “The way he plays, he might end up being one of the best pros,” said one scout. “You’ve got a kid who has never done power skating or summer skill camps. He’s just a hockey player. His compete level is off the charts. He plays both ends of the ice and in all the hard areas.”

Martin didn’t have much depth around him in the Soo, but he piled up points for Canada at the U-18s when he had elite linemates. “Brady Martin can play on my team anytime,” said another scout. “He’s a very competitive guy. He’s a good skater, and he delivers the same effort every night, every shift. He never cheats. He doesn’t take any shortcuts. He’s just a gritty, hardworking player who achieves through energy, effort and skill. He’s the kind of guy every team covets in terms of how he can influence how the whole lineup plays.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Waterloo	U16	27	21	21	42	6
'22-23	Waterloo	U16	23	27	29	56	38
'23-24	Sault Ste. Marie	OHL	52	10	18	28	40
'24-25	Sault Ste. Marie	OHL	57	33	39	72	68
	Canada	WU18	7	3	8	11	29

BEST CASE: Travis Konecny

13



BRAEDEN
COOTES

BORN Feb. 9, 2007, Sherwood Park, Alta.
2024-25 Seattle (WHL)
POS C **HT** 5-11 **WT** 183 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 20 (NA skaters)

➤ **WE DARE YOU** to try to find someone who will say something bad about Cootes. The Thunderbirds star had an excellent WHL season before running roughshod over the competition at the U-18 worlds with Team Canada. “He’s one of my favorites,” said one scout. “He doesn’t have anyone to play with and gets the tough matchups, and he still makes things happen. He’s really smart, with deceptive skill. He skates well and plays hard. He checks all the boxes.”

In a draft class that isn’t seen as very strong, Cootes has a chance to go pretty high, as there aren’t many flaws to his game. Heck, if he were three inches taller and 15 pounds heavier, we might be talking about him in the top five. “It’s just the way he goes about the game,” said another scout. “He plays first PK, first PP, and he has excellent hands. He can pick up a puck in the neutral zone and move up swiftly down the wall and then go wide to the net. He can find players with accurate passes. He’s one of those players who has it all with his skating, skill and sense.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Yale Academy	U15	30	29	38	67	16
'22-23	Sherwood Park	U18	27	14	24	38	20
'23-24	Seattle	WHL	64	14	21	35	16
'24-25	Seattle	WHL	60	26	37	63	18
	Canada	WU18	7	6	6	12	0

BEST CASE: Anthony Cirelli

14



RADIM
MRTKA

BORN June 9, 2007, Havlickuv Brod, Cze.
2024-25 Seattle (WHL)
POS D **HT** 6-6 **WT** 207 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 5 (NA skaters)

➤ **A 6-FOOT-6** right-shot D-man who can skate and move the puck? Whichever team drafts Mrtka will be able to put his name on its roster in permanent marker in a few years. Going to Seattle was a great move for Mrtka, who impressed scouts with his all-around game, although they would like to see more physicality from him. “I love this kid,” said one scout. “GMs see a D-man who can skate and is big and will be able to play 18 minutes a night. It’s not the sexiest pick, but it’s almost like an offensive lineman in football.”

Mrtka joined Seattle after starting the season in the Czech League, and while he put up solid offensive numbers in the WHL, scouts aren’t expecting him to duplicate that in the NHL. But there’s still a lot to like about Mrtka as a future middle-pair blueliner. “I don’t think his offensive game will translate to the next level, but I think transitionally it will,” said another scout. “He’ll move the puck really well. He’s a well-rounded shutdown guy with a good transitional game.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Havlickuv Brod	U17	41	2	7	9	36
'22-23	Trinec	U17	36	1	12	13	14
'23-24	Trinec	Jr.	19	4	7	11	8
'24-25	Trinec	Cze.	10	0	1	1	0
	Seattle	WHL	43	3	32	35	46

BEST CASE: Colton Parayko

15



CARTER
BEAR

BORN Nov. 4, 2006, Winnipeg, Man.
2024-25 Everett (WHL)
POS LW **HT** 6-0 **WT** 179 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 10 (NA skaters)

➤ **BEAR’S DRAFT YEAR** came to an abrupt and crushing end when he sustained a lacerated Achilles in early March. But before that happened, he was putting up gaudy numbers, and he ended up leading the Silvertips in points despite missing 12 games. “He kind of came out of nowhere,” said one scout. “I don’t think anybody had him as a first-rounder at the start of the season, but then he started scoring and just never stopped.”

Like a lot of forwards in this year’s draft, Bear is a tad undersized, but there’s nothing in his play to suggest he’s afraid of going to the scoring areas and absorbing the requisite punishment once he gets there. Scouts project him as a 60-point top-six forward at the NHL level, and he’ll get there on a combination of skill and compete. “For me, this kid is an easy, easy projection,” said another scout. “He’ll be a guy who will play in all situations. If you’re winning or losing by a goal, he’ll be the type of guy who is on the ice in both of those situations.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Wpg. Thrashers	U18	39	25	17	42	34
'22-23	Wpg. Thrashers	U18	31	32	27	59	24
	Everett	WHL	19	1	1	2	0
'23-24	Everett	WHL	67	25	32	57	26
'24-25	Everett	WHL	56	40	42	82	77

BEST CASE: Adrian Kempe

16



LOGAN
HENSLER

BORN Oct. 14, 2006, Woodbury, Minn.
2024-25 Wisconsin (Big Ten)
POS D **HT** 6-2 **WT** 197 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 12 (NA skaters)

➤ **EXPECTATIONS CAN** be a tricky thing. As a late birthday, Hensler had used up his two years with the U.S. NTDP, so he jumped to the NCAA, where he faced older, stronger opponents. So, after beginning the season as one of the top blueliners to watch, his stock did slide. “He had an up-and-down year,” said one scout. “Expectations were higher, and I wanted more from him. But he had his moments and showed some flashes of offense.”

Hensler played a depth role at the WJC. He won gold but didn’t look overly comfortable. That’ll change next year, now that he has more experience. “Some people beat him up because they want more offense or more definition,” said another scout. “The tools drive his game. He’s 6-foot-2, he’s strong, and he’s a terrific skater. He contains and steers people away defensively rather than kill plays. Guys like him who go to the NTDP and hit college early usually turn out. If you’re a naysayer, you want more physicality and production, but I thought he was good, not great, all year.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Hill-Murray	USHS	31	7	17	24	17
'22-23	USA U17	NTDP	60	5	23	28	12
'23-24	USA U18	NTDP	61	4	28	32	26
'24-25	Wisconsin	Big Ten	32	2	10	12	27
	USA	WJC	7	0	1	1	8

BEST CASE: Rasmus Andersson

17



CAMERON REID

BORN April 8, 2007, Aylmer, Ont.
2024-25 Kitchener (OHL)
POS D HT 6-0 WT 193 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 23 (NA skaters)

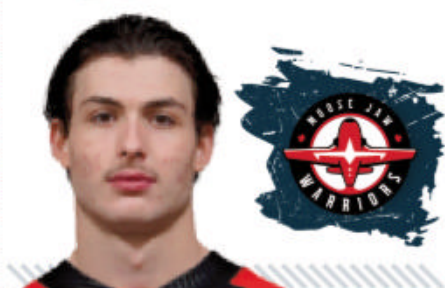
➤ **REID, WHO FINISHED** behind only Kashawn Aitcheson in CHL scoring among draft-eligible defensemen, has shown this season that he can put up points from the back end. But scouts are not projecting the undersized rearguard to do the same thing at the next level. “He’s a good, solid player, but he’s six-feet,” said one scout. “And you can be a good, solid player in the OHL when you’re six-feet. He’s kind of a tweener for me.”

That doesn’t necessarily mean Reid has no future as an effective NHL player, particularly with his high-level skating and good stick skills. There’s definitely a place in the league for players with those traits. “He’s kind of a new breed of NHL defenseman,” said another scout. “He transitions more with his feet than his brain, and he closes the gap really well. I think his tools are going to lead him to be a very good defensive guy in the vein of (Brock) Faber, but not quite as good. There’s not enough offense to get him on the first power play.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Bishop Kearney U14		77	16	43	59	26
'22-23	Bishop Kearney U15		75	22	47	69	-
'23-24	Kitchener	OHL	49	2	21	23	17
	Canada White	WU17	8	1	1	2	0
'24-25	Kitchener	OHL	67	14	40	54	44

BEST CASE: Filip Hronek

18



LYNDEN LAKOVIC

BORN Dec. 12, 2006, Kelowna, B.C.
2024-25 Moose Jaw (WHL)
POS LW HT 6-4 WT 190 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 14 (NA skaters)

➤ **LAKOVIC HAD A** fantastic season as an underager, helping the Warriors to a WHL title. This season was more challenging, with Moose Jaw missing the post-season altogether after losing key veterans and Lakovic sustaining a lower-body injury that cost him more than a month of action. But, in the end, he still led the team in scoring. “One of the reasons Moose Jaw ended up at the Memorial Cup is because of him and the work he put in,” said one scout. “He’s a terrific passer and sees the ice where others may not. He goes to the scoring areas and has been a net-front guy at times. He drives the net and can also find that seam pass needed to set up a teammate.”

Not every NHL team agrees, however. “He’s a big guy who can skate and really shoot it,” said another scout. “I don’t want to call him soft, but he plays light and on the outside. There’s not a lot of work on the backside. He lets linemates get the puck, and I’ve never seen him fight. But with his tools, if he figures it out, you’re going to get a hockey player.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	West Van.	U18	33	18	9	27	8
'22-23	Moose Jaw	WHL	37	2	5	7	8
	Canada Black	WU17	7	1	2	3	2
'23-24	Moose Jaw	WHL	68	18	21	39	14
'24-25	Moose Jaw	WHL	47	27	31	58	4

BEST CASE: Roope Hintz

19



MALCOLM SPENCE

BORN Sept. 22, 2006, Mississauga, Ont.
2024-25 Erie (OHL)
POS LW HT 6-1 WT 203 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 17 (NA skaters)

➤ **BEFORE GOING TO** Erie, Spence was a standout U-16 player who won the OHL Cup while teammates with Michael Misa. In his third season in Erie, Spence popped in more goals, but his point production didn’t take a huge leap from the year prior. “He’s got speed and a great shot,” said one scout. “Probably plagued a bit by inconsistency. You don’t see the same player every night. In some games, he’s very good. In others, he’s a non-factor. Once he gains that level of consistency, he’ll be fine. But right now, he’s been a bit of an underachiever.”

The Otters went through a mid-season coaching change and the loss of star defenseman Matthew Schaefer due to injury, so the campaign wasn’t as successful as it could’ve been. Next year, he’ll ply his trade at the University of Michigan. “He’s a really talented kid and a real good athlete,” said another scout. “He’s a good skater. He has good size. He gets to the net and has some skill to make plays but also to shoot it. He’s good on the penalty kill, and he’s a real good kid.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Miss. Senators	U16	28	29	27	56	14
'22-23	Erie	OHL	64	16	26	42	14
'23-24	Erie	OHL	66	19	43	62	26
	Canada	WU18	7	3	4	7	22
'24-25	Erie	OHL	65	32	41	73	57

BEST CASE: Zach Hyman

20



JACK NESBITT

BORN Jan. 12, 2007, Sarnia, Ont.
2024-25 Windsor (OHL)
POS C HT 6-4 WT 185 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 15 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE SPITFIRES WERE** one of major junior’s biggest surprises this year, going from last place in the Western Conference in 2023-24 to third overall in the OHL in '24-25. Nesbitt, who more than tripled his production in that time, was a big part of the equation. “I know there are games where I wish he played with more jam, but he ends up with a goal and two assists,” said one scout. “It’s his play with the puck and how he has improved his skating. He has the hockey sense. He’s a 5-foot-11 skill guy in a big frame.”

Ah yes, the frame. Like many prospects, Nesbitt just needs gym time and calories to fill out what will be an NHL body, and that’s a huge checkmark. “He’s a big man,” said another scout. “He’s pretty smart. He plays a physical two-way game and had just about a point a game. He’s a big man who has yet to fill out his frame. Once he does and gets some man strength, he will be a physical force. He’s playing well now, but we’re only scratching the surface with this guy.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Lambton	U15	27	23	17	40	14
'22-23	Lambton	U16	28	20	29	49	42
'23-24	Windsor	OHL	58	9	9	18	58
'24-25	Windsor	OHL	65	25	39	64	74
	Canada	WU18	6	2	3	5	6

BEST CASE: Kirill Marchenko

21



JUSTIN CARBONNEAU

BORN Nov. 25, 2006, Levis, Que.
2024-25 Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)
POS RW HT 6-1 WT 191 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 16 (NA skaters)

➤ **THERE'S A LOT** to like in Carbonneau, a power forward who put up impressive offensive numbers in the QMJHL this season. But like a lot of young players, Carbonneau has issues with consistency. If he can get a handle on that, he'll have a solid future in the NHL. "I saw games where he did everything I wanted him to do in terms of showing care and tenacity," said one scout. "But in the playoffs, I didn't see him do those things. If he's the right type of kid, with his body, his powerful skating and his shot, he will be successful at the NHL level."

Carbonneau managed just three points in five playoff games, but he had 14 goals in his final 16 regular-season games and finished tied for second in goals in the QMJHL with 46, so there is potential offense to go with his power game. Although some scouts struggle to find a clear identity, Carbonneau definitely has an upside. "He's an elite thinker," said another scout. "His hockey IQ is very good. His feet are going to pick up as he moves along."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Levis	U18	40	8	32	40	32
'22-23	Levis	U18	23	15	14	29	38
	R.-Nor./B.-B.	QMJHL	32	5	15	20	10
'23-24	Blain.-Bois.	QMJHL	68	31	28	59	32
'24-25	Blain.-Bois.	QMJHL	62	46	43	89	61

BEST CASE: Ryan Donato

22



IVAN RYABKIN

BORN April 25, 2007, Balakovo, Rus.
2024-25 Muskegon (USHL)
POS C HT 5-11 WT 205 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 35 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE WORD THAT** comes to mind when pontificating on Ryabkin's season is "dramatic." He started the season at home in Russia, where he fell out of favor with Dynamo Moscow while bouncing between the KHL, the minors and junior. He then left for the USHL, where he scored two goals in his first game, then got a slew-footing major that resulted in a three-game ban in his second. There are questions about his conditioning, as his 5-foot-11, 205-pound frame may suggest. "He's a wild card," said one scout. "I don't think he was in the best shape when he got here, but he's highly skilled, and he can make plays as well as anyone. The talent package is good. He just needs to do a better job on his body."

For what it's worth, Ryabkin produced as the season went on. As he helped Muskegon make a championship playoff run, he vaulted to the top of the post-season scoring race. "He's a smart forward with a good stick, and he's skilled," said another scout. "He certainly should be at the top of the USHL draft class."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Dyn. Moscow	U16	8	13	10	23	8
	Dyn. Moscow	U17	20	10	23	33	22
'23-24	Dyn. Moscow	Jr.	44	24	34	58	40
'24-25	Dyn. Moscow	Jr.	15	1	11	12	26
	Muskegon	USHL	27	19	11	30	70

BEST CASE: Sam Bennett

23



JAKOB IHS-WOZNIAK

BORN Feb. 1, 2007, Adelaide, Aus.
2024-25 Lulea Jr. (Swe.)
POS LW HT 6-2 WT 184 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 8 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **SCOUTS EXPECTED** Ihs-Wozniak to put up some eye-popping numbers in 2024-25 after breaking the scoring record for 17-year-olds in the Swedish junior league last season, but his production stagnated. That, plus some underwhelming showings at the Hlinka Gretzky and Five Nations tournaments, had him tumble out of the top 10. Scouts want to see Ihs-Wozniak ramp up both his physical play and his urgency. "When he decides to compete and work, he is very hard to stop," said one scout. "I find him wildly inconsistent, particularly with his compete. When he's using his body, he's really good. I just haven't seen him do it that often."

Ihs-Wozniak projects as a second-liner if he figures things out. Multiple scouts said that when he goes to the dirty areas, he can accomplish a lot. "We're still trying to figure him out," said another scout. "He just blends in sometimes. He has some consistency issues that need to be addressed. He has size and does some good things, but you often can't find him."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Lulea	U18	31	19	27	46	6
'23-24	Lulea	Jr.	36	22	28	50	18
	Sweden	WU17	7	1	6	7	2
'24-25	Lulea	Jr.	40	23	34	57	18
	Lulea	Swe.	13	1	1	2	0

BEST CASE: Tyler Toffoli

24



MILTON GASTRIN

BORN June 2, 2007, Ornskoldsvik, Swe.
2024-25 Modo Jr. (Swe.)
POS C HT 6-0 WT 185 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 3 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **THE CAPTAIN OF** Sweden's world U-18 and Hlinka Gretzky Cup teams, Gastrin projects as a responsible two-way center and a strong leader. He has continually proven he can create offense, and he tied for second in scoring for Sweden at the Hlinka Gretzky last summer, with three goals and 10 points in five games. That came despite Gastrin playing tough minutes against the opposition's best players. "There's a lot of love for him," said one scout. "He has good hands, and he's a good skater."

Scouts want Gastrin to show more consistency. "He's really talented, depending on what game you go to," said another scout. "He's more talented than (fellow Swede Jakob) Ihs-Wozniak in terms of skill, but he's a little bit smaller."

Neither a dynamic scorer nor a flashy set-up man, Gastrin relies more on guile than natural talent, and that might limit him as a future offensive threat. But he's good on faceoffs and competes hard for loose pucks. Once he gets bigger and stronger, he'll begin winning more of those battles.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Domsjo	U16	29	32	21	53	14
'22-23	Modo	U18	31	18	19	37	4
'23-24	Modo	Jr.	41	7	9	16	8
'24-25	Modo	Jr.	40	18	24	42	18
	Sweden	WU18	7	3	7	10	2

BEST CASE: Elias Lindholm

25



CULLEN POTTER

BORN Jan. 10, 2007, Hortonville, Wis.
2024-25 Arizona State (NCHC)
POS LW **HT** 5-10 **WT** 172 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 22 (NA skaters)

PLAYERS DON'T OFTEN

leave the NTDP after just one year, but Potter got the chance to jump straight onto the roster at Arizona State and took it. The son of Olympic gold medallist and USA Hockey legend Jenny Potter, Cullen was solid for the Sun Devils as one of the youngest players in college hockey. "He didn't have a big supporting cast, but he can play against big guys," said one scout. "He goes to the hard areas and beats guys by changing speeds. He's a dawg. He hunts pucks. He's on the slighter side, but he doesn't play that way."

Potter rejoined his NTDP mates for the U-18s, helping them to a bronze medal. But not everyone agrees on his inside game. "He's one of the better skaters in the draft, and his individual skill set is quite good," said another scout. "The size matters a little. There are games where he gets swallowed up. A lot of his offense is rush-driven, perimeter-based or on the power play. He's a very good individual player who could use a bit more sense."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Dallas	U16	52	43	44	87	-
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	54	17	29	46	28
	USA	WU17	7	1	7	8	6
'24-25	Arizona State	NCHC	35	13	9	22	6
	USA	WU18	7	4	4	8	4

BEST CASE: Seth Jarvis

26



JOSHUA RAVENSBERGEN

BORN Nov. 27, 2006, N. Vancouver, B.C.
2024-25 Prince George (WHL)
POS G **HT** 6-5 **WT** 190 **CATCHES** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 1 (NA goalies)

THE CONSENSUS

No. 1 goalie in the draft, Ravensbergen may not have the best stats, but he was a busy young man in Prince George. Only five WHL goalies made more saves this year, and Ravensbergen tied for second in wins with 33. "He has quickness, and he's agile and mobile for a big guy," said one scout. "He has really good balance and control of his movements. I like that, for a big guy, he steps out and challenges shooters effectively instead of always staying deep in his net. He gets above the crease on long shots and cuts the angle on shooting lanes on the side. He demonstrates a lot of good awareness in his game and has developed very well."

Ravensbergen has all the fundamentals of an NHL starter, and he'll have a lot of time to refine those skills before turning pro. "The things he's good at, his length, his speed and his compete, are the hardest things to teach," said another scout. "There's definitely some technical and structural refinement that needs to happen, but it's a late-developing position."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	W-L-T	GAA	SP
'20-21	Vancouver NW	U15		DNP	
'21-22	Vancouver NW	U17	12-7-0	3.21	n/a
'22-23	Vancouver NW	U18	15-2-3	2.10	n/a
'23-24	Prince George	WHL	26-4-1	2.46	.907
'24-25	Prince George	WHL	33-13-4	3.00	.901

BEST CASE: Sam Montembeault

27



BEN KINDEL

BORN April 19, 2007, Coquitlam, B.C.
2024-25 Calgary (WHL)
POS C **HT** 5-10 **WT** 176 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 21 (NA skaters)

THERE ARE TWO

main issues in Kindel's game that concern scouts. One he can't control; the other, he can. Scouts wish he were a little bit bigger (can't control) and that he was a better skater (can control). But there is a lot to like about a prospect who led all WHL draft-eligible players in scoring this season. "He just keeps getting better and better every time I see him play," said one scout. "He has a wicked-quick release, but he doesn't have the explosiveness in his skating you'd like to see. If he skated like (Cole) Caufield, he'd be in the top seven or eight."

Despite Kindel's skating deficiencies, scouts like his two-way game. His hockey sense gives him the ability to read plays, and he has good instincts without the puck. And because he's not an overly large player, he tends to find holes in the offensive zone rather than running people over. "He's got a really good engine, but size is a bit of an issue," said another scout. "He's a real competitor, and he has really good offensive instincts."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Burnaby	U15	6	3	8	11	2
'21-22	Burnaby	U15	22	12	35	47	4
'22-23	Yale Academy	U18	29	17	29	46	18
'23-24	Calgary	WHL	68	15	45	60	14
'24-25	Calgary	WHL	65	35	64	99	39

BEST CASE: Jonathan Marchessault

28



COLE RESCHNY

BORN April 6, 2007, Macklin, Sask.
2024-25 Victoria (WHL)
POS C **HT** 5-10 **WT** 183 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 25 (NA skaters)

SOME SCOUTS JOKED

that you don't notice Reschny much in a game until you look at the scoresheet. "He becomes a guy you can discount," said one scout. "You watch him, and you say, 'He was fine. Oh yeah, he had three points.'"

Size and skating are both factors with Reschny, but there is no disputing the fact that he was the offensive alpha male with the Royals this season. Think Zach Benson of the Buffalo Sabres with a little less abrasiveness. "His skating is average," said another scout. "It's not bad, but it's average. His jump is average. His change of speed is average. But he did a lot with not a lot around him in Victoria." As such, he could be a wild card in the draft when all is said and done. "I think Reschny falls in the draft a little bit," said another scout, "and somebody gets a really good player later than they should."

At the NHL level, Reschny projects as a middle-six forward who could move into the top six if he's able to add strength and improve his skating deficiencies.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Northern Alta.	U15	25	40	52	92	42
'22-23	Sask. Blazers	U18	34	23	42	65	38
'23-24	Victoria	WHL	61	21	38	59	14
'24-25	Victoria	WHL	62	26	66	92	44
	Canada	WU18	5	5	3	8	4

BEST CASE: Mikael Granlund

29



BILL ZONNON

BORN Oct. 3, 2006, Montreal, Que.
2024-25 Rouyn-Noranda (QMJHL)
POS C **HT** 6-2 **WT** 187 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 31 (NA skaters)

➤ WE ASKED FOUR different scouts about Zonnon, and they all used exactly the same words in their assessments of him. “I love him,” they all said. There are more talented players in the draft and definitely more offensively explosive players, but there are few others who match Zonnon in intangibles. “He’s a lock to play, and anyone who is a lock to play is someone you should draft,” said one scout. “This guy makes it so easy to project him when you watch him. His energy, hustle and compete jump off the page, plus he has a good shot, can score, and his sense is above average.”

So why isn’t he ranked higher in the draft? Well, there is a ceiling to his potential, and most scouts see him as a third-liner. There’s nothing wrong with that, but there are limitations. “I don’t see him as a top-six player, but I’m fighting with my scouts about that,” said another scout. “I like him just because of his size and compete. He has the size and skating ability, but whether he can play in the top six, I’m not sure.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Northwood	USHS	51	12	15	27	-
'22-23	R.-Noranda	QMJHL	63	16	23	39	12
	Canada White	WU17	6	1	2	3	2
'23-24	R.-Noranda	QMJHL	68	18	40	58	28
'24-25	R.-Noranda	QMJHL	64	28	55	83	32

BEST CASE: Dylan Holloway

30



SHANE VANSAGHI

BORN Oct. 11, 2006, St. Louis, Mo.
2024-25 Michigan State (Big Ten)
POS RW **HT** 6-2 **WT** 215 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 33 (NA skaters)

➤ AS A TRUE freshman on a team ranked No. 1 in the NCAA for stretches, Vansaghi wasn’t expected to play a big role for the Spartans just yet, but he made the most of his chances. “He played that bottom-six role perfectly,” said one scout. “He definitely embraced it, and for me, that’s probably what he’ll be at the next level, playing hard along the walls and down low. He did a really good job.”

Even in his limited role, Vansaghi put up solid stats. And that’s all the more impressive because he was still 17 when the season began. He’s one to watch for the U.S. world-junior squad next year, but it’s the NHL-style game that has teams excited. “He’s a bull in a china shop,” said another scout. “He has more of a likelihood of playing than most people in the draft. He has a sneaky-good skill set and can snap it off. He’s action-based offensively and drives the slot. He’ll play through people and get shots on net. Sometimes, he doesn’t even make a play; he just causes chaos, and his linemates bury the loose puck.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	St. Louis	U16	20	6	8	14	14
'22-23	USA U17	NTDP	54	9	9	18	16
'23-24	USA U18	NTDP	59	12	11	23	56
	USA	WU18	7	0	1	1	2
'24-25	Michigan State	Big Ten	37	6	10	16	30

BEST CASE: Ivan Barbashev

31



HENRY BRZUSTEWICZ

BORN Feb. 9, 2007, Washington, Mich.
2024-25 London (OHL)
POS D **HT** 6-2 **WT** 203 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 19 (NA skaters)

➤ BEING A LONDON Knight in your draft year can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, you’re in arguably the best development program in the CHL, and you’re bound to get a lot of attention from scouts. On the other hand, because of your age, you’re usually playing behind three or four veterans. That was the case for Brzustewicz, the younger brother of Calgary Flames’ defense prospect Hunter. “He’s very well-rounded,” said one scout. “He’s coming along really well in London, and he does all the little things. He’s really composed. It’s almost like he’s been playing in the (OHL) for four or five years.”

Another scout, who believes “the London factor” results in players getting drafted a round higher than they should be, isn’t as high on him, saying Brzustewicz needs to improve his consistency of effort. “When he’s on, he’s up the ice and stepping up on people without the puck; he can be really good,” said the scout. “When he’s not, he can be a turnover machine, and he can get a little bit soft at times.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Shattuck	U14	49	2	11	13	26
'21-22	Shattuck	U14	52	11	42	53	46
'22-23	North Jersey	U16	65	29	36	65	54
'23-24	London	OHL	52	2	4	6	20
'24-25	London	OHL	67	10	32	42	77

BEST CASE: Samuel Girard

32



CAMERON SCHMIDT

BORN Jan. 19, 2007, Edmonton, Alta.
2024-25 Vancouver (WHL)
POS RW **HT** 5-7 **WT** 161 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 43 (NA skaters)

➤ WITH THE EXCEPTION of top-five prospect Michael Misa, there might not be a player in the draft who has a better shot than Schmidt. The reason he’s not in the same conversation as Misa has to do with his size and competitiveness. Scouts were also a little concerned that Schmidt had 26 goals in the first half of the season and only 14 in the second half. “His shot is elite, and his quickness and short-area skating is excellent,” said one scout. “But I think he’s a very incomplete player. I think his compete borders on problematic.”

If Schmidt can improve in some key areas, the Logan Stankoven comparisons may indeed come to fruition. He still has a couple of WHL seasons to figure it out, and there is no disputing his ability to produce. “He’s unbelievably skilled, and he’s a wizard with the puck, but guys pick him up and throw him around in the Western League,” said another scout. “What’s going to happen in the NHL? But that said, people have made a lot of mistakes in the past on little guys with lots of skill.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Rink Academy	U15	32	58	34	92	-
'22-23	Rink Academy	U18	33	25	13	38	-
'23-24	Vancouver	WHL	59	31	27	58	25
'24-25	Vancouver	WHL	61	40	38	78	44
	Canada	WU18	7	2	2	4	8

BEST CASE: Alex DeBrincat

33



BLAKE FIDDLER

BORN July 9, 2007, Nashville, Tenn.
2024-25 Edmonton (WHL)
POS D HT 6-4 WT 209 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 26 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE SON OF** former NHLer Vernon plays a different position, is much bigger and is more coveted at a young age compared to his dad. Vernon was never drafted, and he had to scratch and claw for everything he got as a pro, while Blake is a lock to be taken, almost certainly in the first two rounds. His offensive upside is limited, but once he gains his identity and sorts out his game, he should be a shutdown NHL rearguard. “If the right team takes him with the right development and coaching and gets on him early to teach him the defensive side, I think he’s willing to learn it,” a scout said. “When it’s all said and done, I think you’d be very happy with him as a second-pair defenseman.”

Fiddler makes a good first pass and should put up a lot of points in the next couple of WHL seasons, but his NHL future is as a stay-at-home blueliner. “His skill set doesn’t blow anybody away, but he’s big,” another scout said. “He’s a thick, strong kid, and he’s good defensively. But I don’t think of him as a quarterback on the power play.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Dallas Stars	U14	9	1	2	3	2
'22-23	Dallas Stars	U16	53	6	15	21	-
'23-24	Edmonton	WHL	63	5	10	15	12
'24-25	Edmonton	WHL	64	10	23	33	36
	USA	WU18	7	2	1	3	0

BEST CASE: Gustav Forsling

34



WILLIAM MOORE

BORN March 24, 2007, Mississauga, Ont.
2024-25 U.S. NTDP
POS C HT 6-2 WT 175 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 29 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE U.S. NTDP** got off to a rough start this season, but the U-18s managed to right the ship in the second half. Getting wiped out in the CHL-NTDP series was probably the low point, and as Moore went, so did the team. He wasn’t much of a factor against the CHL’s draft kids, but he did show well at the U-18s. “He’s just scratching the surface,” said one scout. “He’s a talented kid whose body doesn’t always give him what he wants yet. He had a bit of a down year because of that. He’s tall, but he’s just not strong.”

Moore’s mother is from Brazil, his father grew up in New York State, and he was born in Canada, so he has dual Canadian-American citizenship. Oh, and he was a piano virtuoso growing up. But besides that fun fact, you have a Boston College commit who just needs to realize his outsized potential. “He’s a very smart, very instinctive, very good below-the-dots offensive player,” said another scout. “He has an underdeveloped, lanky body, but in terms of offense on that team, he’s the cream of the crop.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Miss. Senators	U16	56	35	39	74	8
'22-23	Tor. Marlboros	U16	30	23	37	60	8
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	50	23	20	43	20
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	55	23	24	47	6
	USA	WU18	7	3	8	11	2

BEST CASE: Barrett Hayton

35



JACK MURTAGH

BORN Aug. 22, 2007, E. Greenbush, N.Y.
2024-25 U.S. NTDP
POS LW HT 6-1 WT 200 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 30 (NA skaters)

➤ **WHILE MOST OF** his team got caved in at the first-ever CHL-NTDP showdown, Murtagh showed up and looked dangerous for the Americans. He wasn’t going to be pushed around, even if the NTDP was clearly outgunned. A high-volume shooter who tied for the NTDP lead in game-winning goals and finished third in team scoring, he’s got the skill associated with kids who have typically gravitated to ‘The Program’ over the years. “He’s a talented kid with a good shot,” said one scout. “He can skate, and he’s competitive.”

A Boston University commit, Murtagh was a solid contributor for Team USA at the world U-18s. Overall, he was one of the more impressive players on the NTDP throughout the year. “Jack’s been interesting on that team because he has a little bit of hardness to his game,” said another scout. “He takes pucks to the net and plays around in those hard areas. On a team that hasn’t been overly successful and doesn’t have a lot of high-end skill, his game has jumped out for people.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Bishop Kearney U14		73	67	46	113	26
'22-23	Bishop Kearney U15		68	52	49	101	-
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	53	16	21	37	22
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	47	20	26	46	32
	USA	WU18	7	2	4	6	4

BEST CASE: Jake Neighbours

36



SIMON WANG

BORN July 27, 2007, Beijing, Chn.
2024-25 Oshawa (OHL)
POS D HT 6-5 WT 215 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 34 (NA skaters)

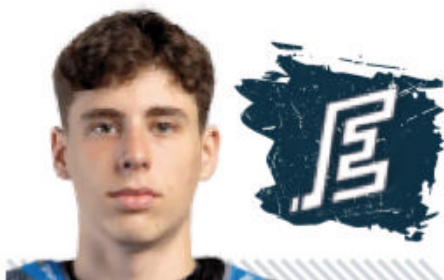
➤ **NO ONE IS** expecting Wang to step into the NHL right away. Heck, it might take at least five years until he’s ready. But the payoff could be tremendous. “He’s a big, rangy guy and as raw as they come,” said one scout. “He has a long stick and makes good reads. He’s just very raw. He’s a big project right now.”

Born and raised in China, Wang came to Canada at 12 and began this season in the OJHL with the King Rebellion. When the NCAA rules changed to allow CHLers, Wang moved to OHL Oshawa for an extra challenge, and he’s committed to Boston University in the future. “He has the physical tools,” said another scout. “His skating, when he’s moving, borders on elite. Talk about being a unicorn. The skills have gotten better. He can make plays. But I wonder about his hockey sense and how he processes the game. That doesn’t bode well down the road when things get tougher. But if he has the right attitude, there’s no reason why he can’t be an NHLer down the road. That’s what player development is for.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	North York	U16	33	3	4	7	24
	North York	Jr. A	4	0	0	0	0
'23-24	Brantford	Jr. A	28	0	7	7	22
'24-25	King	Jr. A	38	4	18	22	73
	Oshawa	OHL	32	0	2	2	19

BEST CASE: Esa Lindell

37



VOJTECH
CIHAR

BORN March 29, 2007, Chomutov, Cze.
2024-25 Karlovy Vary (Cze.)
POS LW **HT** 6-0 **WT** 175 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 4 (Int'l skaters)

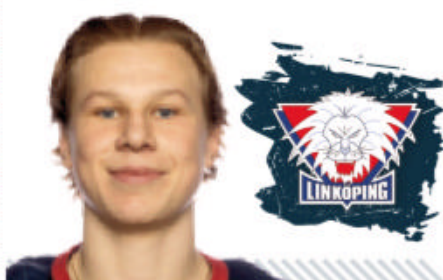
➤ **A STATLINE THAT** shows only nine points in 43 games might not seem like much, but when you look under the hood, there's a lot to like about Cihar. First, those nine points were scored playing against pros and led all U-18 players in the Czech league this season. And when Cihar plays with his peers, his stats are much better. Last summer, he took home a silver with the Czechs at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, and he added a WJC bronze medal in January.

It would be interesting to see what Cihar could accomplish in major junior. He was drafted in 2024 by WHL Lethbridge but decided to stay home in a league notorious for not playing young players and for not developing their offensive games. "I like him, and I think he's easily projectable," said one scout. "I think you've got a solid third-line guy with a speed-based attack game. With his speed and puck-pursuit abilities, I think there's a home for him on the second line in the right situation. But I don't know that he ever becomes a primary offensive player."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Chomutov	U17	32	18	22	40	10
'22-23	Karlovy Vary	U17	31	23	23	46	24
'23-24	Karlovy Vary	Jr.	35	14	12	26	20
'24-25	Karlovy Vary	Cze.	43	4	5	9	8
	Czechia	WJC	7	1	1	2	29

BEST CASE: Nick Foligno

38



EDDIE
GENBORG

BORN April 20, 2007, Trollhattan, Swe.
2024-25 Linköping (Swe.)
POS RW **HT** 6-1 **WT** 179 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 6 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **SPLITTING THE YEAR** between Linköping's pro and U-20 teams, Genborg established himself as a physical, high-energy, two-way winger. On the high end, Genborg projects as a top-six forward. At the low end, he's a solid third-liner with the potential to move up. "This kid is heavy, with and without the puck," said one scout. "His skill and sense aren't bad, and there's probably enough there that he can find his way onto a higher line because he'll do the things other guys don't want to do or aren't as good at."

Scouts saw a player in January who seemed to be finding his footing offensively and may have emerged as a top-six candidate before regressing late in the season. So, the upshot is that when Genborg gets to the NHL, he may be worth more than he is now. But even if he isn't, there's a big-league future for him. "He has size, physicality and great perception, and I like the way he attacks the slot and battles for pucks," said another scout. "He'll be a third-line guy that guys will want on their line."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Linköping	U18	27	5	9	14	8
'23-24	Linköping	Jr.	25	4	1	5	41
	Sweden	WU17	7	1	2	3	6
'24-25	Linköping	Jr.	28	19	15	34	26
	Linköping	Swe.	28	2	0	2	4

BEST CASE: Will Cuyllé

39



LUCA
ROMANO

BORN June 25, 2007, Toronto, Ont.
2024-25 Kitchener (OHL)
POS C **HT** 5-11 **WT** 177 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 48 (NA skaters)

➤ **LIKE MANY OF** the forwards in the 2025 draft, Romano is plagued by concerns about his size and consistency. That said, he can produce offense and is poised to be a big-time point producer in the OHL over the next two seasons. Projections for Romano vary wildly, even among scouts for the same team. "I'm not much of a fan, but my OHL guy loves him," said one scout. "I find he darts around and has good short bursts, yet he never seems to get there to pressure the puck and never seems to get into the slot with the puck."

Scouts see a player they describe as a "good junior," which is code for concerns about whether his game will translate to the NHL level. He's definitely going to have to put on some muscle in order to make the jump, which hardly makes him unique among young players. "For me, consistency is the big thing with him," said another scout. "He has some ability, but it's not there all the time. If he figures it out and can get that consistency, he has a lot of good tools."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Tor. Jr. Cdns	U16	36	15	31	46	14
	Stouffville	Jr. A	1	0	0	0	0
'23-24	Kitchener	OHL	56	10	12	22	8
	Canada Red	WU17	7	1	1	2	2
'24-25	Kitchener	OHL	67	25	26	51	22

BEST CASE: Blake Coleman

40



ERIC
NILSON

BORN May 11, 2007, Calgary, Alta.
2024-25 Djurgården Jr. (Swe.)
POS C **HT** 5-11 **WT** 156 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 7 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **THE SON OF** former NHLer Marcus Nilson, Eric was born in Calgary when his father was a Flame, but there is no doubt he is a Swede for hockey purposes. Nilson was a point-per-game player in Sweden's junior league this season, and while scouts liked his play at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup last summer, they were less enamored with his showing at the Five Nations tournament in February. "He's a guy who grows on you," said one scout. "If you really start watching him, he doesn't have a lot of high-end plays. But every time he's on the ice, the play and the puck seems to go through him. If they break out of the zone, he's the one making the pass. If they're making a play in the offensive zone, he's the one who started it. He's a very subtle, sneaky-good player."

There is some optimism that Nilson might be able to add more offense to his game as a pro. "He has good sense, and he distributes the puck well," said another scout. "He does have offensive tools, and he has some skill, but I see him as more of a cog than a catalyst."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Orebro	U16	10	9	9	18	6
'23-24	Orebro	U18	27	17	32	49	18
	Orebro	Jr.	29	6	9	15	14
'24-25	Djurgården	Jr.	37	12	26	38	56
	Sweden	WU18	7	2	3	5	12

BEST CASE: Vincent Trocheck

41



WILL HORCOFF

BORN Jan. 23, 2007, Birmingham, Mich.
2024-25 Michigan (Big Ten)
POS C **HT** 6-5 **WT** 190 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 24 (NA skaters)

LIKE FORMER

teammate Cullen Potter, Horcoff did something rare this year: he left the NTDP during the season to join an NCAA program. Interestingly, he had slightly better numbers playing a full-time college schedule at Michigan. "It was a good move for him to go to college," said one scout. "His hands and size are unique. It could be a really strong investment on a longer play. It will take some time, he's very weak for his size, but his hands are notable on the half-wall. He has a knack for pucks finding him in the upper slot, and he's pretty darn good net-front on the power play."

The son of former NHLer and current Detroit assistant GM Shawn Horcoff rejoined many of his NTDP mates at the U-18 worlds. "I like his puck game, and I like him from the blueline in," said another scout. "He's strong along the walls, protects pucks and makes plays off the cycle. He has a nice touch around the net. It's in transition where he struggles. Getting in and out, his feet are going to kill him, but the puck play is solid."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Little Caesars	U14	62	70	45	115	-
'22-23	Little Caesars	U15	80	80	93	173	88
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	54	11	8	19	44
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	19	4	4	8	24
	Michigan	Big Ten	18	4	6	10	6

BEST CASE: Andre Burakovsky

42



JACOB ROMBACH

BORN April 1, 2007, Blaine, Minn.
2024-25 Lincoln (USHL)
POS D **HT** 6-6 **WT** 196 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 42 (NA skaters)

CONSIDER ROMBACH

a sleeper in this draft class. One scout even said the USHL Lincoln blueliner could sneak his way into the first round. If Rombach does go that high, it won't be due to gaudy point totals. Instead, Rombach's game is all about good ol' fashioned defending. You know, the type that wins NHL playoff series. "He's a big kid who can really skate," said one scout. "His length and the way he plays is what the NHL has gone to. I think he has a chance to go fairly high."

Rombach is a University of Minnesota commit who helped Lincoln make a run to the Western Conference final, where they fell to Waterloo. He also played for Team USA at the World Jr. A Challenge, earning a gold medal in the process. In a down year for the USHL, he's been a bright spot. "He's probably the most improved player from last year to this year," said another scout. "He has good range, good gaps and an active stick. He makes the outlet pass. He's good in transition, and the top speed is good. He's got a chance to be a player."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Minn. Giants	U14	4	3	2	5	0
'22-23	Spr. Lake Park	USHS	26	9	10	19	25
'23-24	Lincoln	USHL	59	3	6	9	14
'24-25	Lincoln	USHL	57	3	15	18	57

BEST CASE: Joel Edmundson

43



RYKER LEE

BORN Nov. 8, 2006, Wilmette, Ill.
2024-25 Madison (USHL)
POS RW **HT** 6-0 **WT** 170 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 28 (NA skaters)

THE USHL'S 2024-25

rookie of the year was one of the league's leading scorers for most of the season, but whether that prowess will translate to the next level is the question. "Although the skating is in question, he has a high compete level and very good anticipation," said one scout. "He's a very skilled player who drives offense."

Lee came up through the Shattuck-St. Mary's program, where his U-14 team featured the likes of Macklin Celebrini, Cole Eiserman and Brodie Ziemer. Six members of that squad have already been drafted by NHL teams, and that number could increase to 10 this summer. Next year, Lee will move on to the NCAA with powerhouse Michigan State. There, Spartans coach Adam Nightingale can help Lee round out his game. "He's an offensive player with soft hands who goes to the hard areas and has a great shot and release," said another scout. "But he's never going to be the first guy back. He cheats for offense, and he's an average to below-average skater. He's not a go-to guy."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Shattuck	U14	50	21	51	72	20
'21-22	Shattuck	U15	61	34	46	80	8
'22-23	Shattuck	U16	57	55	68	123	8
'23-24	Shattuck	USHS	57	45	54	99	24
'24-25	Madison	USHL	58	31	37	68	18

BEST CASE: Conor Garland

44



MATTHEW GARD

BORN April 7, 2007, Winnipeg, Man.
2024-25 Red Deer (WHL)
POS C **HT** 6-4 **WT** 193 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 37 (NA skaters)

IT'S TELLING THAT

Gard finished the season as Red Deer's leading scorer despite putting up just 36 points. But the tall, lanky center developed a lot of good habits in his second year of major junior, and the points will come when he has better teammates around him. However, there's still concern that his offense will be limited. "It seems like the Sutters have had a good impact on him in terms of teaching him to play the game the right way," said one scout. "But I don't believe he's a skill guy by any stretch."

There is a sense that Gard has not quite grown into his body and still has some filling out to do before he's a finished product. His straight-line skating is already fair and will get better as he gets stronger. Scouts like his work habits in both games and practices. "A lot goes on faith and projection with this kid," said another scout. "He was on a bad team and had some things work against him, but by all accounts, he's a high-level kid who plays and practises hard. And that gives me hope."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Rink Academy	U15	27	10	32	42	63
'22-23	Rink Academy	U18	19	9	10	19	30
'23-24	Red Deer	WHL	55	7	11	18	32
'24-25	Red Deer	WHL	66	19	17	36	81
	Canada	WU18	7	1	3	4	4

BEST CASE: Marcus Foligno

45



THEO STOCKSELIUS

BORN July 24, 2007, Norrtälje, Swe.
2024-25 Djurgarden Jr. (Swe.)
POS RW **HT** 6-3 **WT** 183 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 13 (Int'l skaters)

> YOU COULD FORGIVE Stockselius for seeing his development stall a bit over the past couple of years. When he was 15, he sustained a severe broken leg in a U-18 game. But that wasn't all. Later that year, he underwent two neck surgeries to remove his thyroid gland after doctors found a cancerous tumor. Stockselius has been playing catch-up ever since, and while he's done a valiant job, scouts see an underdeveloped player right now. "He has spent the past two years recovering instead of developing physically," said one scout. "If he's healthy, there's a lot of potential there, but it has to start coming soon."

There have been some encouraging signs. Stockselius produced well in Sweden's junior league and at the U-18 worlds this year. "He's smart, and he's good without the puck," said another scout. "He tries to be physical and accountable, but it doesn't always work out for him. If your doctors get a clean bill of health, he probably moves up because he's a good player with no real weaknesses."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Taby	U16	23	11	14	25	4
'22-23	Taby	U16	31	29	50	79	10
'23-24	Djurgarden	U18	37	19	44	63	8
'24-25	Djurgarden	Jr.	40	22	29	51	50
	Sweden	WU18	7	1	4	5	2

BEST CASE: Nino Niederreiter

46



BEN KEVAN

BORN Jan. 3, 2007, Fairfield, Calif.
2024-25 Des Moines (USHL)
POS RW **HT** 6-0 **WT** 173 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 55 (NA skaters)

> KEVAN HAD A chance to extend his season after the Buccaneers' campaign ended thanks to an invite to play for the U.S. at the U-18 worlds, where he scored the OT-winner in the bronze-medal game against Slovakia. The Bucs failed to make the playoffs in either of Kevan's two years in Des Moines, so what is his true potential? "He's very skilled," said one scout. "Playing on a team that is not the most talented around him, he gets into 1-on-1 mode because I don't know if he trusts the options around him, which is understandable. I don't know if he'll make a lot of plays at the pro level, but he definitely has the shot and compete level. Skating is a bit of a limiter for him."

Kevan, who is committed to Arizona State, still has a lot to prove. "There's no backup game," said another scout. "But he's also a product of where he developed. I still think he's a late-bloomer and closer to his floor than his ceiling. He's got a good stick, soft hands and good offensive-zone instincts. It's just the other aspects of the game."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Los Angeles	U14	61	67	48	115	45
'22-23	Los Angeles	U15	74	62	50	112	24
'23-24	Des Moines	USHL	59	24	33	57	10
'24-25	Des Moines	USHL	51	13	30	43	43
	USA	WU18	7	2	1	3	0

BEST CASE: Jonathan Drouin

47



VACLAV NESTRŽIL

BORN April 6, 2007, Prague, Cze.
2024-25 Muskegon (USHL)
POS RW **HT** 6-5 **WT** 187 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 36 (NA skaters)

> PLAYING IN THE USHL landed Nestržil a scholarship from the University of Massachusetts that's set to begin in 2026-27, but he is very much an unfinished product. The Regina Pats own his CHL rights, so he may find himself playing major junior next season. At 6-foot-5 and 187 pounds, Nestržil remains an intriguing prospect who could develop into a power forward once he adds more muscle to his lanky frame. He has good skill and improved at the USHL level as the season progressed. "I find he often gets less from his tools than he should," said one scout. "I find there are times when he does a lot of work with very little results."

Scouts agree there is potential, but the next couple of seasons will be crucial in determining whether he'll be able to make an impact at the NHL level. "I think he needs a better road map," said another scout. "He needs to be programmed a little differently to get more from his effort. The size, skill and skating are all there, and he's a big guy with lots of upside."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Prague	U17	15	8	9	17	6
'23-24	Prague	U17	27	24	19	43	26
	Muskegon	USHL	11	0	0	0	4
	Czechia	WU17	7	4	1	5	0
'24-25	Muskegon	USHL	61	19	23	42	51

BEST CASE: Mason Marchment

48



TOMAS POLETIN

BORN April 30, 2007, Prague, Cze.
2024-25 Pelicans Jr. (Fin.)
POS LW **HT** 6-1 **WT** 200 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 14 (Int'l skaters)

> WHILE CZECH JUNIOR hockey is experiencing a renaissance period right now, many of the nation's top talents are still playing their developmental years in foreign lands. For Poletín, that's meant Finland, where he has played the past two seasons in Lahti. "He's a smart player," said one scout. "He's strong on the puck, and he has good hockey sense. He might have to work on his skating a bit, but he's a good hockey player."

Poletín even got into 15 games with the Pelicans' pro team this year. He also suited up for all five playoff games and three of five relegation games. In the latter, Lahti avoided demotion to the Mestis by beating Jokerit. After that, he captained the Czechs at the U-18 worlds. "He's a hardworking, competitive guy," said another scout. "It's not a surprise he was the captain of the U-18 team. He leads by example. He's a good support player offensively, as he makes himself available in good spots and provides good puck support. He's really good on the forecheck, so he has some two-way value as well."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Prague	U17	36	27	26	53	79
'23-24	Pelicans	Jr.	21	5	9	14	39
	Czechia	WU18	5	1	1	2	2
'24-25	Pelicans	Jr.	25	13	7	20	14
	Pelicans	Fin.	15	0	0	0	2

BEST CASE: Bobby McMann

49



ZACHARY MORIN

BORN Jan. 25, 2007, Lachenaie, Que.
2024-25 Saint John (QMJHL)
POS LW HT 6-1 WT 181 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 103 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE SON OF** a former minor-league tough guy, Morin bounced around Quebec and the U.S. before landing with Saint John after leaving USHL Youngstown early in the season. He's set to join Boston University in 2026-27. And while there are glimpses of brilliance that indicate he could be a top-six NHLer, there are also red flags. "He just hasn't taken that next step," said one scout. "He has all the talent in the world, but he just hasn't taken it to the next level."

There is a lot of projection going on with Morin, whose post-draft development will be vital. He put up decent scoring totals considering he was playing for one of the worst teams in the QMJHL, but several scouts were less than impressed with his effort and body language at times. "I think he's above average in a couple of areas," said another scout. "He was better when he went to the Quebec League, but he didn't do a lot for me this season. His skating is good, and he has some skill, but I don't see any attribute that really stands out."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Little Caesars	U15	77	58	72	130	88
'23-24	Youngstown	USHL	54	8	11	19	114
	Canada Red	WU17	7	0	1	1	4
'24-25	Youngstown	USHL	4	0	1	1	0
	Saint John	QMJHL	56	16	20	36	21

BEST CASE: Christian Dvorak

50



COLE MCKINNEY

BORN March 16, 2007, Chicago, Ill.
2024-25 U.S. NTDP
POS C HT 6-0 WT 200 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 32 (NA skaters)

➤ **IF YOU HADN'T** guessed by now, it was not a banner year for the U.S. NTDP. But McKinney was one of the positives, leading 'The Program' in scoring, and he was the only player to average more than a point per game. "He was solid all year, just very consistent," said one scout. "He has a good work ethic, and he's a good two-way center. He had a good run production-wise and was probably one of their better guys."

McKinney was the best faceoff man for Team USA at the U-18 worlds, winning 60 percent of his draws, though some talent hawks believe his pro future will be on the wing. "He's a smart two-way guy who plays in spurts and shows flashes," said another scout. "He projects more as a winger at the NHL level. Plays a bit like Brett Howden. At times, he's sleepy, then he'll do something. He's strong, has soft hands and moves well, so there are a lot of good attributes."

McKinney is committed to NCAA Michigan, where the Wolverines staff can help him build upon those attributes.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Chicago	U14	20	9	22	31	6
'22-23	Chicago	U15	15	12	21	33	16
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	44	12	19	31	24
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	51	24	31	55	55
	USA	WU18	7	3	2	5	2

BEST CASE: Jake Evans

51



KURBAN LIMATOV

BORN March 20, 2007, Moscow, Rus.
2024-25 Dynamo Moscow Jr. (Rus.)
POS D HT 6-3 WT 198 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 9 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **WITHOUT THE BENEFIT** of any in-person viewings by North American scouts, Limatov still managed to make a good impression with his compete level and ability to take care of business in his own end. He's seen as a stay-at-home D-man, but NHL teams are hoping that doesn't turn into a literal description.

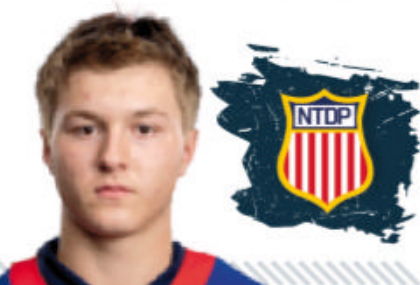
If Limatov were playing in North America, he'd likely go higher in the draft. And while top Russian players Matvei Michkov and Ivan Demidov made teams pay for passing on them in the draft, the 'Russian factor' is still very real. "If he were in North America and I didn't have to worry about anything and our development guys could have him from Day 1, I'd feel a lot more comfortable," said one scout. "He competes pretty hard and skates well. He has some good size, and he seems willing to get into the fight."

Limatov is unlikely to produce much offense at the NHL level. "I really like this kid," said another scout. "I don't see him having any offensive impact, but there's something there."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Dyn. Moscow	U17	20	3	5	8	12
'23-24	Dyn. Moscow	U17	8	0	6	6	2
	Dyn. Moscow Jr.		30	1	5	6	24
'24-25	Dyn. Moscow	Jr.	46	8	15	23	44
	Dyn. Moscow	KHL	1	0	0	0	0

BEST CASE: Justin Holl

52



CHARLIE TRETHEWEY

BORN Aug. 2, 2007, Ellicott City, Md.
2024-25 U.S. NTDP
POS D HT 6-1 WT 200 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 46 (NA skaters)

➤ **LIKE MANY OF** his NTDP teammates, Trethewey came into the season ranked significantly higher than he will ultimately be drafted. He's a right-shot defenseman with good two-way instincts, but it would be fair to say his output was disappointing. "He's one of those guys who was bigger and stronger when he was younger, and now that everyone is big and strong, they've caught up," said one scout. "He's been highly touted for years, but I haven't seen him get a whole lot better. He hasn't taken that next step."

Scouts are struggling to identify what role Trethewey, who's committed to Boston University, will play at the NHL level. There is a good array of tools, but he has struggled to put it all together. As another scout said, "There's an identity crisis. He kind of has a tweener role for me. He can be physical. But will he embrace the defensive side of the game? The compete is there. But is it there enough? I think you're looking at a kid who is going to have to embrace a limited role."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Pittsburgh	U14	13	5	5	10	16
'22-23	Little Caesars	U15	81	20	66	86	46
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	52	12	23	35	43
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	54	6	13	19	33
	USA	WU18	7	0	1	1	2

BEST CASE: Josh Manson

53



KRISTIAN EPPERSON

BORN May 16, 2006, Mequon, Wis.
2024-25 Saginaw (OHL)
POS LW **HT** 5-11 **WT** 183 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 47 (NA skaters)

➤ **EPPERSON, WHO** went undrafted in 2024, came to the OHL from the U.S. NTDP, where he'd been buried down the depth chart. But with Saginaw, Epperson had a chance to shine playing wingman to superstar Michael Misa, and the offense flowed freely. "He's shown by playing with Misa that he can play with good players," said one scout. "He makes plays, shares the puck and has a good knack around the net. The offensive skills are good, and he's right up there at the top of plus-minus, so he has a good two-way game. He has good sense and a good compete level."

Epperson was also a strong penalty-killer for Saginaw, racking up three goals and six points shorthanded. Like many on the Spirit, his season ended on a down note with his performance in a five-game first-round playoff loss to lower-ranked Erie. "He played well in the games I saw, but my understanding is there was some inconsistency," said another scout. "He's a hardworking player who complements Misa well when they play together."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Shattuck	U14	50	37	50	87	63
'21-22	Shattuck	U15	56	39	61	100	46
'22-23	USA U17	NTDP	59	18	23	41	40
'23-24	USA U18	NTDP	42	7	9	16	46
'24-25	Saginaw	OHL	58	27	53	80	87

BEST CASE: Luke Evangelista

54



VIKTOR KLINGSSELL

BORN Feb. 10, 2007, Jarfalla, Swe.
2024-25 Skellefteå Jr. (Swe.)
POS LW **HT** 5-9 **WT** 188 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 19 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **SCOUTS WERE NOT** impressed with the numbers that Klingsell put up in the Swedish junior league this season, but he had a great showing at the U-18 worlds, with eight points in seven games en route to a silver medal. In what has become a case of wash-rinse-repeat in this draft, Klingsell is skilled but undersized. "His skill is good, and his hockey sense is very good," said one scout. "The sense and skill make up for the skating deficiencies, but when you throw in the fact that his compete level is, at best, average, there are some concerns there."

Klingsell does have good offensive instincts and has the ability to make some eye-popping plays at the junior level. As is the case with many players in this draft, scouts are hoping maturity will bring with it more consistency. As such, there will be a lot of projecting with him. "If you think he might be able to figure it out, and his skating gets a little better, his hockey sense and skills might be enough for a team to take a chance on him," said another scout.

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Jarfalla	U16	25	24	25	49	4
'22-23	Skellefteå	U18	32	8	8	16	4
'23-24	Skellefteå	U18	31	28	34	62	10
'24-25	Skellefteå Jr.	Jr.	43	17	22	39	6
	Sweden	WU18	7	2	6	8	4

BEST CASE: Max Domi

55



SASCHA BOUMEDIENNE

BORN Jan. 17, 2007, Oulu, Fin.
2024-25 Boston University (HE)
POS D **HT** 6-1 **WT** 175 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 18 (NA skaters)

➤ **BOUMEDIENNE WAS** in tough as the second-youngest player in the NCAA this season. His stock dropped from first-round status as the year went on, but then he went to the U-18 worlds and put up a ton of points for the silver-medal-winning Swedish side. So, what's the deal? "He's a lightning rod because the tools are better than the toolbox," said one scout. "I thought his second half at BU was very good. Now, I know the points are there (at the U-18s), but he's incredibly careless at times. And it's not risk-taking; he'll just go to make an exit and miss the pass."

The son of former NHLer Josef Boumedienne had help at BU, often partnering with Canucks first-rounder Tom Willander, but he showed he could survive on his own when Willander was at the WJC. "He played good minutes and needed some work defensively, but overall, he handled himself well," said another scout. "The one thing is, what does he project as? Maybe a good transitional defenseman who moves the puck well? But that's a tough one."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Ohio	U16	54	3	15	18	-
'22-23	Ohio	U16	49	11	31	42	-
'23-24	Youngstown	USHL	49	3	24	27	32
'24-25	Boston Univ.	HE	40	3	10	13	33
	Sweden	WU18	7	1	13	14	2

BEST CASE: Mike Matheson

56



THEODOR HALLQUISTH

BORN June 14, 2007, Taby, Swe.
2024-25 Örebro Jr. (Swe.)
POS D **HT** 6-2 **WT** 172 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 10 (Int'l skaters)

➤ **IT WAS A** pleasant surprise for scouts that Hallquist played 12 games for Örebro's pro team, which is a significant accomplishment for a 17-year-old blueliner. Hallquist projects as an all-around D-man once he fills out his frame. His physical game is his forte, but he's not just a banger. "I think his hockey sense is underrated," said one scout. "I don't think it will manifest into big numbers, but he moves the puck really well, and he's aware of his options."

There are no real discernible flaws in Hallquist's game, which seemed to improve exponentially as the year went on. His willingness to play a physical game helps him in net-front battles and in the corners. In fact, Hallquist seems to exude a sense of calm when defending. "He's one of those solid defensive guys who makes the game simple and plays hard and doesn't have the weaknesses of some of the other big, defense-first guys," said another scout. "On the other side of the puck, he executes pretty cleanly, and he's able to create some flow up the ice."

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Stocksund	U18	31	3	10	13	14
'23-24	Örebro	U18	38	5	24	29	18
'24-25	Örebro Jr.	Jr.	41	5	17	22	48
	Örebro	Swe.	12	0	0	0	0
	Sweden	WU18	7	0	1	1	6

BEST CASE: Olli Maatta

57



ADAM
BENAK

BORN April 10, 2007, Plzen, Cze.
2024-25 Youngstown (USHL)
POS C **HT** 5-7 **WT** 164 **SHOOTS** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 58 (NA skaters)

➤ **AS A USHL** rookie, Benak led Youngstown in scoring with 59 points. Then, despite joining the team late, he led the Czechs at the U-18 worlds with seven points. But, cynically, the most important number for him is 5-foot-7. “He’s a dynamic, skilled playmaker with hockey sense, IQ and vision,” said one scout. “All that good stuff, but he’s 5-foot-7. He’ll be a great college player, but those guys don’t play center in the NHL, especially in the playoffs. He’ll have to be like a Mats Zuccarello or Jason Zucker, but those guys play hard. Benak is more on the outside. But he’s fun to watch.”

Benak will have to move to the wing if he wants to make his NHL dreams come true, but there’s no doubt the kid is prolific. Last summer, he finished second overall in scoring at the U-18 Hlinka Gretzky Cup, where his Czech team took home silver. “He’s really smart, really instinctive, plays with a bit of an edge and works despite his size,” said another scout. “What he did at the Hlinka has to have weight on his draft.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	Plzen	Jr.	30	10	21	31	8
'23-24	Plzen	Jr.	29	8	21	29	18
	Plzen	Cze.	18	0	2	2	18
'24-25	Youngstown	USHL	56	17	42	59	36
	Czechia	WU18	4	2	5	7	4

BEST CASE: Mats Zuccarello

58



ALEKSEI
MEDVEDEV

BORN Sept. 10, 2007, St. Petersburg, Rus.
2024-25 London (OHL)
POS G **HT** 6-2 **WT** 178 **CATCHES** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 6 (NA goalies)

➤ **AFTER COMING TO** Canada to play his final year of minor hockey in Toronto, Medvedev was drafted by the London Knights. And, rather than have him watch from the bench, the Knights had him play Jr. B last season. The result was a much more OHL-ready goalie in 2024-25, when Medvedev won awards for the best goals-against average for a rookie goalie and shared the trophy for the league’s best team GAA. With Knights’ No. 1 Austin Elliot aging out after this season, Medvedev will have the starter’s crease to himself in London next year.

Medvedev is technically sound, and his athleticism allows him to get to pucks that look like certain goals. He’s also an above-average puckhandler. “He had a pretty good season, even though he played behind a guy who plays a lot,” said one scout. “His time has been more limited than it normally would for a goalie of his caliber. He competes. He has size. He controls his rebounds. And he never gives up on a puck. It looks like he’ll continue to get better.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	W-L-T	GAA	SP
'22-23	Vaughan	U16	19-19-0	1.92	.915
'23-24	St. Thomas	Jr. B	11-15-0	4.00	.904
'24-25	London	OHL	22-8-2	2.79	.912

BEST CASE: Stuart Skinner

59



PEYTON
KETTLES

BORN Sept. 1, 2007, Winnipeg, Man.
2024-25 Swift Current (WHL)
POS D **HT** 6-5 **WT** 190 **SHOOTS** R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 39 (NA skaters)

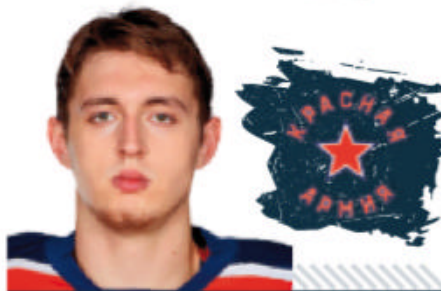
➤ **AS ONE SCOUT** said, it’s pretty difficult to miss out on being drafted when you’re a 6-foot-5 D-man who shoots right and skates well. There’s just too much to like about those guys to pass them up. Projecting what they can become is a challenge, but teams are counting on the finished product being worth the gamble. That’s the case with Kettles, who played a lot of minutes for a mediocre WHL team and is a long way from realizing his potential.

“He’s an excellent skater, and he plays hard,” said one scout. “I really want to like him, but that would force me to forget about a lot of the games I watched him play this season. His skill is just OK, and his hockey sense is average. He’s one of those bigger guys who can skate who might have a little trouble getting there, but there’s definitely a chance he can be a fifth or sixth D-man.” Other scouts see more of a sure thing. “The size really jumps out, and he moves pretty well,” said another scout. “He’s the kind of defenseman teams are looking for, and he has some upside.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Rink Academy	U15	30	9	26	35	40
'22-23	Rink Academy	U18	22	2	14	16	20
'23-24	Swift Current	WHL	61	2	11	13	44
	Canada Red	WU17	7	0	1	1	0
'24-25	Swift Current	WHL	53	5	9	14	65

BEST CASE: Mattias Samuelsson

60



PYOTR
ANDREYANOV

BORN Jan. 22, 2007, Volsk, Rus.
2024-25 K.A. Moscow Jr. (Rus.)
POS G **HT** 6-0 **WT** 207 **CATCHES** L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 1 (Int’l goalies)

➤ **AS IS THE** case with almost every Russian prospect, scouts acknowledge that more people would be talking about Andreyanov if he were playing in North America. But Russian stoppers have had plenty of NHL success lately, and the fact they are surrounded by mystery makes them even more intriguing. “I like him, and I get a good feel when I look at this kid,” said one scout. “He’s a wide-bodied kid. I don’t know if he’s fat or just wide-bodied, but the way he moves, I’d be shocked to find out he’s fat.”

Andreyanov plays with a sense of calmness and composure, but there are times when he struggles to control rebounds. He can also have a tough time when he is facing a lot of traffic, and his aggressive style will likely need to be tamed a little. Even though the video viewings have been limited, scouts are still interested. “I like his game,” said another scout. “He reads the game well, and he makes the simple play when he can. I don’t see any glaring weaknesses there.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	W-L-T	GAA	SP
'22-23	CSKA Moscow	U16	n/a	2.05	n/a
	CSKA Moscow	U18	n/a	1.63	n/a
'23-24	CSKA Moscow	U17	n/a	2.12	n/a
	K.A. Moscow	Jr.	9-8-0	3.04	.916
'24-25	K.A. Moscow	Jr.	23-6-6	1.75	.942

BEST CASE: Lukas Dostal

61



CONRAD FOND RK

BORN June 1, 2007, St. Paul, Minn.
2024-25 U.S. NTDP
POS C HT 6-0 WT 193 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 45 (NA skaters)

➤ **THE FACT THAT** Fondrk had an underwhelming season hardly puts him in a minority when it comes to NTDP players, nor is he the only one who has seen his draft status tumble because of it. “When the year started, I thought he would be a first-round guy,” said one scout. “If you take reputation, bias and other lists out of the equation, it would be hard to argue this kid is a third-rounder. I don’t think anybody can say he hasn’t underachieved.”

So if it was just a bad season, a team taking Fondrk might end up with a quality player lower in the draft. Fondrk was highly rated at the start of the year for a reason. His skill level is right there with projected first-rounder Cole Reschny, and there are flashes of an effective two-way game on display. “His skating is good, and his skill is really good,” said another scout. “He’s got soft hands, he can shoot it, and he has a good touch around the net. There’s no weakness in his game except for the intangibles. The sum was less than its parts, at least this season.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'21-22	Mt. St. Charles	U14	58	58	50	108	-
'22-23	Mt. St. Charles	U15	54	63	42	105	-
'23-24	USA U17	NTDP	54	20	25	45	4
	USA	WU17	7	2	6	8	0
'24-25	USA U18	NTDP	40	13	14	27	6

BEST CASE: Owen Tippett

62



LUCAS BECKMAN

BORN Aug. 23, 2007, Montreal, Que.
2024-25 Baie-Comeau (QMJHL)
POS G HT 6-1 WT 182 CATCHES L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 2 (NA goalies)

➤ **THE DRAKKAR HAD** a solid year, and there was no shame in losing to juggernaut Moncton in the second round of the ‘Q’ playoffs. The fact Baie-Comeau did so with a 17-year-old rookie goalie reflected well on Beckman. “It’s unusual to see a 17-year-old as the No. 1 goalie in the CHL, on top of it on a strong team,” said one scout. “He gave them a chance to win every night. He has great consistency. The one knock might be that his size is pretty average for the style he plays.”

Beckman is listed at 6-foot-1, which is perfectly acceptable for the NHL, but what talent hawks are saying is that he can’t be a strict butterfly goalie at that size. But he can be effective as a hybrid netminder. Beckman won gold for Canada as Jack Ivankovic’s backup at the U-18 worlds, winning the one game he started against Latvia and getting into one period against Norway. “I love everything about him,” said another scout. “He’s competitive. He’s quick. He reads plays really well, keeps his hands up and plays at the top of the blue ice.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	W-L-T	GAA	SP
'22-23	Laval-Montreal	U18	12-9-0	3.21	.900
'23-24	Laval-Montreal	U18	7-4-0	2.71	.907
	Baie-Comeau	QMJHL	7-1-0	1.32	.938
'24-25	Baie-Comeau	QMJHL	31-18-2	2.65	.914
	Canada	WU18	1-0-0	0.75	.955

BEST CASE: Joseph Woll

63



FRANCESCO DELL'ELCE

BORN June 23, 2005, King City, Ont.
2024-25 UMass (HE)
POS D HT 6-1 WT 179 SHOOTS L
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 82 (NA skaters)

➤ **WHEN DELL'ELCE** was first up for the draft in 2023, he was a bit of a free spirit on the blueline, and scouts bemoaned his lack of structure. But after being passed over twice and finding his game in college, Dell'Elce has them singing a different tune. “He plays, like, 28 minutes a night,” said one scout. “He’s skilled, can skate, and he escapes from pressure thanks to his feet. UMass has settled him down. He’s a new-age defenseman who won’t run you over but angles guys off and closes plays down.”

UMass has been a great incubator for D-men under coach Greg Carvel, whose acolytes include Cale Makar, Mario Ferraro and Zac Jones. Dell'Elce led all Minutemen ‘D’ in scoring in his first year with the team. “He played with a ton of confidence this year, and it really looked like the coaching staff gave him the green light to join the rush and get involved offensively,” said another scout. “He’s very good along the offensive blueline, and he moves the puck well. He handled himself really well as a freshman.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'20-21	Tor. Marlboros	U16				DNP	
'21-22	St. Andrew's	CAHS	44	10	22	32	24
'22-23	St. Andrew's	CAHS	51	20	42	62	48
'23-24	Penticton	Jr. A	54	9	29	38	26
'24-25	UMass	HE	40	7	17	24	12

BEST CASE: T.J. Brodie

64



MASON WEST

BORN Aug. 3, 2007, Edina, Minn.
2024-25 Edina (USHS)
POS C HT 6-6 WT 215 SHOOTS R
CENTRAL SCOUTING No. 27 (NA skaters)

➤ **WEST MAY BE** the biggest X-factor in the draft because he’s also a great football player. The Minnesota high-schooler has multiple Div. I scholarship offers to play quarterback, and there’s big (NIL) money to be had right away there. But teams who pass on West due to that uncertainty do so at their own risk. He’s a physical specimen with hockey sense and a heavy, accurate shot. “His straight-line skating is really good,” said one scout. “There are some agility issues, though. Short-course agility and change of direction is a little bit of a struggle. The compete level is inconsistent. There’s always effort, but there’s no natural meanness or jam.”

West played in the USHL for Fargo at the end of the season and looked great right away. But NHL teams will need to know he’s committed to hockey for the future. “A unique case, obviously,” said another scout. “He just doesn’t have the reps of some of the other guys, so there’s a long runway. He doesn’t excel at any one category, but he checks a lot of boxes.”

YR	TEAM	LEA.	GP	G	A	PT	PIM
'22-23	MN North Stars	U15	11	9	8	17	-
	Edina	USHS	30	9	18	27	10
'23-24	Edina	USHS	30	15	23	38	12
'24-25	Edina	USHS	31	27	22	49	10
	Fargo	USHL	10	1	8	9	6

BEST CASE: Ryan McLeod

65



BRANDON GORZYNSKI

C, 6-1, 185, Calgary (WHL)
68-17-25-42-16

➤ Late riser has a good stick, a solid shot and he's first to the puck. His skating is a little wonky and knock-kneed right now, but he's effective regardless.

66



DANIIL PROKHOROV

RW, 6-6, 209, Dyn. St. Pete. Jr. (Rus.)
43-20-7-27-14

➤ Could shock and go in the first round, but the 'Russian factor' will likely drop him. Huge kid who can skate and shoot the puck well. Finishes his checks, too.

67



DAKODA RHEAUME-MULLEN

D, 6-0, 185, Michigan (Big Ten)
35-3-6-9-8

➤ Son of Manon Rheaume plays a steady defensive game and can move the puck up the ice effectively. But what will his profile be at the pro level?

68



TYLER HOPKINS

C, 6-1, 179, Kingston (OHL)
67-20-31-51-18

➤ Great combination of size and skating; he can really motor. His numbers in Kingston were solid, and he's in a great spot to continue developing his game.

69



JACK IVANKOVIC

G, 5-11, 178, Brampton (OHL)
25-12-5, 3.05, .903

➤ Top goalie at U-18 worlds. Competitive and hardworking but lacks NHL size. Will have to prove himself like Michael DiPietro, Devon Levi and Dustin Wolf.

70



MAX PSENICKA

D, 6-4, 178, Portland (WHL)
24-1-6-7-12

➤ Showed great potential after going to 'Dub' mid-year. Still very raw, but big Czech skates well, likes to get involved offensively and has great length to his game.

71



HAYDEN PAUPANEKIS

C, 6-4, 196, Kelowna (WHL)
71-22-21-43-57

➤ Traded for Andrew Cristall in January. Big kid went from physical fourth-liner in Spokane to top-line center in Kelowna. Future is probably somewhere in between.

72



SEAN BARNHILL

D, 6-5, 205, Dubuque (USHL)
54-4-8-12-14

➤ Very raw, so he could go higher or lower than this. Northeastern commit is tall and can really skate. Must catch up to most peers in terms of development.

73



LASSE BOELIUS

D, 6-0, 181, Assat Jr. (Fin.)
34-4-14-18-16

➤ Boelius will likely be the first Finn off the board thanks to his skating and puck-moving. He's an elusive offensive 'D' who must work on his defensive game.

74



ETHAN CZATA

C, 6-1, 175, Niagara (OHL)
68-21-34-55-72

➤ Two-way center on a rising IceDogs team will likely see his production keep growing as part of Niagara's talented young core. Won gold with Canada at the U-18s.

75



MACEO PHILLIPS

D, 6-6, 228, U.S. NTDP
53-2-4-6-103

➤ A big, raw, physical defenseman, Phillips is a University of Minnesota commit. Scouts want to see more puck skills, and his trajectory is still a question mark.

76



JAN CHOVAN

C, 6-2, 185, Tappara Jr. (Fin.)
39-11-12-23-6

➤ Slovak playing in Finland was great at U-18 worlds. Beloved team-first guy is big, competitive and physical. He'll be a perfect bottom-six grinder at the pro level.

77



NATHAN BEHM

RW, 6-1, 192, Kamloops (WHL)
59-31-35-66-12

➤ Behm put up great offensive numbers on a Blazers team that missed the playoffs, but consistency was an issue. When he's on, though, he can really score.

78



OWEN GRIFFIN

C, 5-10, 160, Oshawa (OHL)
62-22-29-51-33

➤ Cerebral two-way center plays a Nick Suzuki-type game. And like the Habs captain, he's a little undersized. Griffin was red-hot for Oshawa in the playoffs.

79



DAVID BEDKOWSKI

D, 6-4, 215, Owen Sound (OHL)
37-3-4-7-73

➤ Two injuries slowed down his season, and he's a converted forward, so Bedkowski is more of a long-term play. But his size and skating are nice pro elements.

80



FILIP EKBERG

LW, 5-10, 166, Ottawa (OHL)
53-16-29-45-8

➤ Slow start in first OHL year, but Swede finished with 11-game point streak before ripping it up at the world under-18s. He's slight, but his skill set is undeniable.

81



ALEXANDER ZHAROVSKY

RW, 6-1, 163, Ufa Jr. (Rus.)
45-24-26-50-30

➤ Great vision, nice touch with puck and has some length to him. Because many teams were limited to video scouting, they wonder if he has much of a compete level.

82



CARLOS HANDEL

D, 6-0, 172, Halifax (QMJHL)
52-3-23-26-20

➤ German kid played well at the world under-18s after his first year in Halifax. Great puck skills, and he jumps into holes offensively, but needs to work on his defending.

83



EVAN PASSMORE

D, 6-5, 212, Barrie (OHL)
62-3-8-11-58

➤ Playoff-style 'D' will get a lot of looks thanks to his size and physicality. He's not the swiftest skater around, but Passmore could be a Jamie Oleksiak-style pro.

84



MICHAL PRADEL

G, 6-4, 195, Tri-City (USHL)
9-4-0, 2.41, .899

➤ Pradel had a solid U-18 worlds for Slovakia. He's a big kid who covers a lot of net. Whoever drafts him can influence where he plays next year, which is a plus.

85



REESE HAMILTON

D, 6-0, 172, Regina (WHL)
59-4-10-14-33

➤ High-end skater and puck-mover already has a lot of international reps with Canada. Trade from Calgary to a weaker Regina team impacted his stats.

86

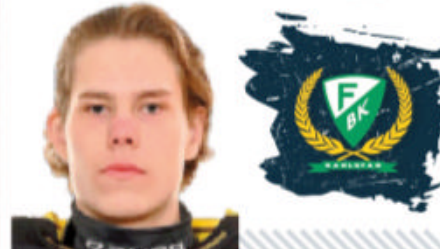


CARTER AMICO

D, 6-5, 225, U.S. NTDP
13-0-3-3-10

➤ Another big blueliner, Amico missed most of the year due to injury. When healthy, the Boston University commit is a big, physical, shutdown guy who competes.

87



MANS GOOS

G, 6-5, 190, Farjestad Jr. (Swe.)
11-12-0, 3.17, .893

➤ The most important number for Goos is his height, at 6-foot-5. He's a project goalie who'll take time, but he did get experience with Sweden at the U-18 worlds.

88



LUKA RADIVOJEVIC

D, 5-9, 165, Muskegon (USHL)
38-3-19-22-39

➤ Son of ex-NHLer Branko came into first USHL year with a lot of hype. The puck skills and power-play acumen are nice, but he's small and easy to play against.

89



KARL ANNBORN

D, 6-1, 187, HV71 Jr. (Swe.)
39-3-21-24-4-12

➤ Puck-moving 'D' has decent size – though not enough for some scouts. Earned silver at the U-18 worlds with Sweden and made SHL debut this season.

90



ATTE JOKI

C, 6-0, 190, Lukko Jr. (Fin.)
40-15-17-32-8

➤ Hardworking kid with solid build. Can grind. Kills penalties and is heavy on forecheck. Joki will occasionally flash some offensive skill, but more would be nice.

91



MATIAS VANHANEN

LW, 5-8, 159, HIFK Jr. (Fin.)
42-17-30-47-22

➤ He's not big, and he's not fast, but Vanhanen has the best hockey sense of any Finn up for this year's draft. Smart playmaker is an ace on the power play.

92



SEMYON FROLOV

G, 6-3, 203, Kryl. Sovetov Jr. (Rus.)
16-7-3, 2.12, .921

➤ Big stopper plays with poise and has good athleticism. Put up solid numbers in junior, especially in the playoffs. Don't be surprised if he gets KHL time soon.

93



LOUIS-ANTOINE DENAULT

G, 6-8, 206, Quebec (QMJHL)
17-17-5, 3.13, .902

➤ Denault has a great compete level in the crease. Still needs to get used to his gargantuan frame, so he's a long-term project in need of a good goalie program.

94



CAEDEN HERRINGTON

D, 6-2, 204, Lincoln (USHL)
56-16-18-34-67

➤ Passed over last year out of prep school. Rounded out his game in the USHL, adding defense to his offensive blueliner profile. University of Vermont commit.

95



EMILE GUITE

LW, 6-1, 176, Chicoutimi (QMJHL)
59-16-14-30-18

➤ After an awesome U-18 Hlinka Gretzky Cup for Canada, Guite had a season from hell with the Sags. But scouts know it made him mad, and he has size and skill.

96



MASON MOE

C, 6-1, 187, Madison (USHL)
51-17-26-43-26

➤ Catch-and-shoot center can score and has heaviness to his game. Pace is an issue, and he tailed off after a hot start. Rebounded in playoffs. NCAA Minnesota commit.

97



ALEX HUANG

D, 6-0, 170, Chicoutimi (QMJHL)
64-7-33-40-16

➤ Great feet and escapability. Elusive with the puck, and he makes solid retrievals in his own end. His skating is good, too. Only knock is he's pretty slender.

98



LEV KATZIN

RW, 5-8, 176, Guelph (OHL)
44-16-32-48-26

➤ Caught fire for Storm after jump from USHL to OHL. Small, dynamic winger competes hard. He'll need time to overcome the size bias. Penn State commit.

99



TRENTEN BENNETT

G, 6-8, 205, Kemptville (CCHL)
13-15-2, 2.92, .912

➤ Towering goalie fared well with OHL Owen Sound while mainly getting Jr. A reps. Good mobility and coordination for his size. Committed to NCAA St. Lawrence.

100



OLIVER TURNER

D, 6-4, 190, St. Andrew's (CAHS)
52-2-27-29-109

➤ Big, raw D-man plays with bite, clears crease and skates well. Played games with OHL Erie and is committed to Colgate, though scouts wonder if that'll change.



DIGGING DEEP FOR GOLD

These players likely won't be drafted early, but they could end up as solid NHL contributors **BY TONY FERRARI**

EVERYONE IS EXCITED FOR their team's No. 1 pick, but often, the most successful teams are the ones that hit on their picks outside of Round 1. Brandon Hagel, Jesper Bratt and Devon Toews, for example, were all drafted outside of the top 100. Let's take a look at who the diamonds in the rough could be for 2025.

MICHAL SVRCEK C, Brynas Jr. (Swe.)

One of the most high-energy players in the draft, Svrcek is a skilled, highly competitive forward who attacks every shift head-on. He hunts the puck down when he doesn't have it and plays at a breakneck pace.

ARVID DROTT RW, Djurgarden Jr. (Swe.)

With top-notch speed and a good shot, Drott has the potential to be so much more than he is right now. He's a north-south attacker who wants to put defenders on their heels.

GUSTAV HILLSTROM C, Brynas Jr. (Swe.)

A well-rounded center who has the ability to advance play offensively and turn play around defensively. Hillstrom has good size, plays a smart game in all three zones and uses his linemates well.

L.J. MOONEY RW, U.S. NTDP

An injury interrupted Mooney's season, but, despite his small stature, he's one of the most physically engaged forwards in the class. He invites contact and embarrasses foes with his skill and playmaking.

ZEB LINDGREN D, Skelleftea Jr. (Swe.)

Thanks to a solid 6-foot-1, 195-pound frame and good

mobility, Lindgren is so close to being a good two-way defender. He is quite raw, but the tools and flashes are impressive.

ANTHONY ALLAIN-SAMAKE D, Sioux City (USHL)

Allain-Samake has a solid two-way game built around his skating. He has flown under the radar because his USHL stats don't jump off the page.



TINUS LUC KOBLAR C, Leksand Jr. (Swe.)

A physically intense, versatile, mobile forward from Norway who consistently improved as the season went along in Sweden. Koblar has shown the



ability to generate offensive chances, but he needs to refine his game and get stronger.

QUINN BEAUCHESNE D, Guelph (OHL)

As far as defense-leaning blueliners go, Beauchesne is an excellent option in the mid-rounds. His puck-moving ability and intelligent reads in both ends could make him much more valuable than players drafted higher.

HARRY NANSI RW, Owen Sound (OHL)

Size, speed and work rate are the hallmarks of Nansi's game. He is one of the youngest players in the draft and has plenty of room to grow. He does so many things right, but on an underwhelming Attack team, his efforts didn't always translate to points.

MAX WESTERGARD LW, Frolunda Jr. (Swe.)

A great finish to his season in Sweden saw the young Finn play meaningful minutes in the SHL playoffs and more than hold his own. He works hard, skates fast and has been developing his playmaking. **H**

TOP 100 ALPHABETICALLY

Kashawn Aitcheson (9)	Peyton Kettles (59)
Carter Amico (86)	Ben Kindel (27)
Pyotr Andreyanov (60)	Viktor Klingsell (54)
Karl Annborn (89)	Lynden Lakovic (18)
Sean Barnhill (72)	Ryker Lee (43)
Carter Bear (15)	Kurban Limatov (51)
Lucas Beckman (62)	Brady Martin (12)
David Bedkowski (79)	Porter Martone (3)
Nathan Behm (77)	Cole McKinney (50)
Adam Benak (57)	Roger McQueen (8)
Trenten Bennett (99)	Aleksei Medvedev (58)
Lasse Boelius (73)	Michael Misa (2)
Sascha Boumedienne (55)	Mason Moe (96)
Henry Brzustewicz (31)	William Moore (34)
Justin Carbonneau (21)	Zachary Morin (49)
Jan Chovan (76)	Radim Mrtka (14)
Vojtech Cihar (37)	Jack Murtagh (35)
Braeden Cootes (13)	Jack Nesbitt (20)
Ethan Czata (74)	Vaclav Nestrasil (47)
Francesco Dell'Elce (63)	Eric Nilson (40)
Louis-Antoine Denault (93)	Jake O'Brien (11)
Caleb Desnoyers (6)	Evan Passmore (83)
Victor Eklund (7)	Hayden Paupaneis (71)
Filip Ekberg (80)	Maceo Phillips (75)
Kristian Epperson (53)	Tomas Poletin (48)
Blake Fiddler (33)	Cullen Potter (25)
Conrad Fondrk (61)	Michal Pradel (84)
Anton Frondell (5)	Daniil Prokhorov (66)
Semyon Frolov (92)	Max Psenicka (70)
Matthew Gard (44)	Luka Radivojevic (88)
Milton Gastrin (24)	Joshua Ravensbergen (26)
Eddie Genborg (38)	Cameron Reid (17)
Brandon Gorzynski (65)	Cole Reschny (28)
Mans Goos (87)	Dakoda Rheume Mullen (67)
Owen Griffin (78)	Jacob Rombach (42)
Emile Guite (95)	Luca Romano (39)
James Hagens (4)	Ivan Ryabkin (22)
Theodor Hallquist (56)	Matthew Schaefer (1)
Reese Hamilton (85)	Cameron Schmidt (32)
Carlos Handel (82)	Jackson Smith (10)
Logan Hensler (16)	Malcolm Spence (19)
Caeden Herrington (94)	Theo Stocksilius (45)
Tyler Hopkins (68)	Charlie Trethewey (52)
Will Horcoff (41)	Oliver Turner (100)
Alex Huang (97)	Matias Vanhanen (91)
Jakob Ihs-Wozniak (23)	Shane Vansaghi (30)
Jack Ivankovic (69)	Simon Wang (36)
Atte Joki (90)	Mason West (64)
Lev Katzin (98)	Alexander Zharovsky (81)
Ben Kevan (46)	Bill Zannon (29)



TOP 10 OVERAGERS



PETTERI RIMPINEN

THIS TIME 'ROUND

These players won't go undrafted again after failing to be selected on their first tries **BY TONY FERRARI**

EVERY YEAR, GOOD PROSPECTS go undrafted, and they have two choices: feel sorry for themselves or prove people wrong and force a team to call their names next June. While not every player has the latter mindset, the players here embraced it.

PETTERI RIMPINEN

G, 19, Kiekko-Espoo (Fin.)

An incredible performance at the WJC, helping the Finns to an unexpected silver medal, put Rimpinen on the radar for the 2025 draft. He played 40 Liiga games and posted the league's second-best save percentage.

JAMIRO REBER

C, 18, HV71 (Swe.)

After flashing bits of skill last year, Reber was solid in the SHL this season. His speed and motor meshed perfectly with some slick playmaking and a nose for the net.

TOPIAS HYNNINEN

C, 19, Jukurit (Fin.)

Hynninen was Jukurit's second-highest regular-season scorer and then went off for 10 points in five games in the relegation playoffs, carrying a massive load offensively. He's a solid two-way forward who brings more offensive creation than he's given credit for.

JULIUS SUMPFF

C, 20, Moncton (QMJHL)

Sumpff is a tactician who is better than the sum of his parts. He constantly moves around when he doesn't have the puck

to find space and generate scoring chances. He connects plays well and doesn't try to over-complicate the game with the puck on his stick.

CHARLIE CERRATO

LW, 20, Penn State (Big Ten)

In his freshman year, Cerrato was a top-20 scorer in college hockey, and he was a driving force on one of the NCAA's most impressive teams. Cerrato possesses excellent speed and rush-attacking abilities.

LUKE MISTELBACHER

RW, 19, Swift Current (WHL)

With a great shot and an understanding of how to get open in the offensive zone, Mistelbacher exploded offensively this year. He needs to clean up his skating, but his finishing and offensive skills are tantalizing. He signed a tryout deal with AHL Iowa for a taste of the pros after his WHL season ended.

TOMAS GALVAS

D, 19, Liberec (Cze.)

With a supremely skilled offensive game, Galvas is a player who was quite highly re-

garded last year but was passed over due to concerns with his own-zone play. His defensive game has improved somewhat, but it remains a work in progress. His offense, however, outweighs the worry.

DANIIL USTINKOV

D, 18, Kusanacht (Sui.2)

Ustinkov plays an understated game as a defensive blueliner with solid passing on the breakout. His skating is his foundation, and he leverages it to defend in all situations.

DANIEL NIEMINEN

D, 19, Pelicans (Fin.)

Nieminen uses his skating all over the ice and has played well against men in the Liiga. He defends with his feet, evades pressure and is comfortable carrying the puck up ice. His passing is an asset in the offensive zone.

COLE DAVIS

LW, 19, Windsor (OHL)

There is a lot for NHL coaches to like about Davis' game. He brings physicality, invites contact, crashes the net, disrupts play on the forecheck and can get under an opponent's skin. **H**



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- Dual-density HD Protection inner core offers better pad stability and superior seal to the ice while greatly reducing our pad weight to 4 lbs, 4 oz in a 34+1" size.
- New wider MRC – Motion Response Channel facilitates better pad rotation and leg support in the butterfly position, while featuring grey Nash material for superior durability.
- Redesigned PFS – Precision Fit Strapping System features new 2" Dual Elastic Calf straps for more secure lower-leg fit, as well as a 2" Elastic Knee Strap with dual attachment locations at knee or upper calf.
- Exclusive "Lock-Lace" Bungee toe-tie system with new Clarino toe-wear attachment tab.
- 11" Pro width featuring pre-curved shape for optimal performance.
- New XPG2 Pro Elite graphics.
- Available in sizes: 32" to 37" with either +1" or +2" options.

 CUSTOM CRAFTED IN
CANADA

XP G₂
PRO ELITE

CATCHER



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HOCKEY.com

>FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro-level performance.
- All-new glove design featuring a one-piece thumb/cuff for maximum coverage.
- 60-degree break angle with finger-to-thumb closure.
- Floating cuff design for increased wrist mobility.
- SureGrip palm material for increased grip.
- Air-knit mesh finger stalls for comfort and heat dispersal.
- Double tee for increased pocket width and puck retention.
- 3/8" felt / HD Protection inner palm with defined break for game-ready flex.
- Triple backhand/wrist PFS – Precision Fit Strapping System for quick and secure adjustment.
- HD Protection in finger-back pad.
- New XPG2 graphics.
- 2 lb, 4oz weight.
- Medium or Large sizes - both with 45" Pro Perimeter.



XPG₂
PRO ELITE

BLOCKER



> FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro-level performance.
- Bindingless face for maximum blocking area.
- Dual-density HD inner blocking board with PE for reduced weight and durability.
- HD Protection side hand plate with low-profile design for better stick control.
- Reinforced Nash Palm with ventilated mesh gussets for breathability.
- Wide flared cuff design for increased range of motion.
- HD Protection foam finger guards with Velcro adjustable design.
- Side index-finger pad to cover over stick paddle.
- Back hand cushion pad for added comfort and protection.
- New XPG2 graphics.
- 1 lb, 12 oz weight.
- 8" x 15" maximum Pro blocking surface.

CUSTOM CRAFTED IN
CANADA

XPG² **PRO ELITE** **PANTS**



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> FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro-level performance.
- XPG2 Pro Elite model features the ultimate in protection, comfort and performance.
- Design features maximum-coverage thigh pads for increased net coverage.
- Waist design feature more segments for added flexibility and performance.
- Extra-large tail bone/spine protector with HD Protection.
- Large double inner five-hole blocks to eliminate five-hole area.
- Pro Front Flex panels feature HD Protection in the high-impact areas.
- Precision Fit System inner belt for more secure fit while the pant remains loose with a barrel-fit design for maximum coverage.
- 420 denier urethane coated "High Tenacity" nylon outer-shell construction.
- Durable polyester "Double Knit" inner lining.
- Available in Black, Navy, Red and Custom Colors.
- XPG2 Pro Elite sizes: SM, MED, LG, XL, XXL, and XXXL.



XPG₂
PRO ELITE

CHEST & ARMS

> FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro-level performance.
- Lightweight Pro design with durable 420 Nylon and Air-Knit construction.
- Air cushion chest pad with “Shock Shield” sternum plate with extra-thick HD Protection.
- Contoured body chest block design with separate Velcro adjustable side Rib-Wings for maximum coverage and protection.
- Pro-design, adjustable-length arms feature tapered floating forearm and bicep caps constructed of HD-110 foam with Air-Tek Velcro inserts for added comfort and protection.
- Moulded plastic elbow caps with air cushion foam inserts.
- PFS – Precision Fit Strapping System for the back harness features Quick-Change side-release buckles for easy replacement and dual wrist strap attachment areas for custom fit.
- Large back pad with high-density foam spine protection.
- Available in sizes: SM, MED, LG, XL.



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ADVERTORIAL



TREVOR McKENNEY
GM, Protective Division

CANADIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP

THE STORY OF McKENNEY HOCKEY



@GOALIEGEARNERD

AMONG THE LITANY OF EQUIPMENT used throughout the sporting landscape, hockey goalie gear stands alone – unique in its ability to differentiate different stoppers from each other and its inherent connection with each goalie's identity. This is because the gear serves not only as protection – as it does in almost every other sport – but also as the vehicle through which goalies accomplish their jobs. Netminders are also covered in more equipment than almost any other athlete on the planet. Which brand of equipment goalies wear, the color scheme and unique designs their equipment carries and the specs are all individualized to the person standing in the blue paint facing down shooters.



Trevor McKenney's goalie-equipment business started in much the same way most great businesses do – here read: out of a basement. McKenney began making goalie equipment in 1993 under the McKenney Hockey brand. To start, it was a part-time venture. And as any responsible entrepreneur would, he learned all facets of the job: from sewing and assembling goal pads and gloves to marketing and sales. In 1996, three years after the company's birth, McKenney partnered with Mike McNamara, with whom he had previously worked at McMartin Goal Equipment and Louisville TPS. The two then launched McKenney Custom Sports Inc. as a full-time operation.

The two were inspired to act based on their observation of a troubling trend in the industry: equipment prices for goalies were fast becoming a significant burden to those who dreamed of tending twine. McKenney felt that, by reducing overhead costs, it was possible to offer well-made, moderately priced products to those dreamers. So to that end, McKenney decided to sell only to a select handful of retailers – thereby avoiding the added cost of sales representatives. And to cap marketing expenditure, the brand would throw its focus behind customer service and customization rather than hunting “big-league names” as representatives of its identity. With this business model, McKenney grew and developed a loyal group of customers.

Thanks to McKenney's craftsmanship, other hockey retailers looking for high-quality, domestic hockey manufacturing capabilities quickly sought McKenney out. Those Franklin-branded pads worn by Grant

Fuhr and the goalies of Pro Beach Hockey? McKenney made them. Wayne Gretzky's Hespeler hockey pants? Same story. In 2014, McKenney forged on to outfit goalies in Canada's other national sport – lacrosse – launching a line of goalie equipment for box lacrosse and ensuring stoppers all over Canada could safely tend twine wherever they chose.

In early 2022, McKenney was acquired by Roustan Hockey Ltd., whose mission is to grow the game through companies that can produce high-quality, Canadian-made products at affordable prices. Like McKenney, Roustan acts based on a desire to reduce hockey's financial barrier to entry. With Roustan's resources, McKenney's reach will only grow. And more goalies will be able to get their own set of affordable, custom, Canadian-made equipment as unique as they are. •

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PANTS

> FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Made, Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro level performance.
- XPG2 models features pro level protection, comfort, and performance.
- 420 denier urethane coated “High Tenacity” nylon outer shell construction.
- Maximum width air cushioned thigh pads with rear leg splits.
- 3-way flex pad in upper thigh area with HD Protection inserts for added protection.
- Lace up front area for added adjustment.
- Large double inner five-hole blocks to eliminate five-hole area.
- Precision Fit System inner belt for more secure fit while the pant remains loose with a barrel fit design for maximum coverage.
- Stocked in Black, Navy, Red with Custom Colors available



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HOCKEY.com



> SIZES AVAILABLE

PRO SM, MED, LRG, XL, 2XL, 3XL

INT MED, LRG

JR SM, MED, LRG

YTH MED, LRG



PRO | INTERMEDIATE | JUNIOR | YOUTH

XPG₂

CHEST & ARMS



>FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Made, Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro level performance.
- Lightweight Pro design featuring durable 420 Nylon and Air-Knit construction.
- Large shoulder and arm floaters for added protection and maximum blocking area.
- Adjustable arm system features “Quick-Adjust” webbing straps with Velcro attachment.
- Pro chest pad design with side Rib-Wings for maximum protection and mobility.
- Universal arms feature moulded elbow caps with air cushion foam.
- Air cushion chest pad with “Shock Shield” sternum plate with HD Protection.
- PFS – Precision Fit Strapping System back harness features Quick-Change side release buckles for easy replacement.



>SIZES AVAILABLE

PRO SM, MED, LRG, XL

INT MED, LRG, XL, 2XL

JR SM, MED, LRG

YTH MED, LRG

 CUSTOM CRAFTED IN
CANADA

XP G₂

INTERMEDIATE | JUNIOR | YOUTH

PADS



> FEATURES & SPECS

- Canadian Made, Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro level performance.
- Ultra thin pre-curved profile with angled solid outer side roll and two inner core options: CORE FLEX LTE offers a flexible pre-curved shape with dual inner breaks above and below knee or CORE FLY LTE offers a stiffer pre-curved shape with no internal breaks.
- Firm flat face pad design offers more active and controlled rebounds.
- Flexible boot core for maximum mobility and range of motion.
- Dual-density HD Protection inner core offers better pad stability and superior seal to the ice while greatly reducing our pad weight.
- New wider MRC – Motion Response Channel facilitates better pad rotation & leg support in the butterfly position.
- Redesigned PFS – Precision Fit Strapping System features new Dual Elastic Calf straps.

> SIZES AVAILABLE

INT 30+1", 31+1", 32+1" at 10.25" width

JR 26+1", 28+1", 30+1" at 9.5" width

YTH 22+1", 24+1", 26+1" at 8.5" width



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*Custom Youth, Junior and Intermediate goal pads & gloves exclusively available at McKenneyHockey.com only.

BLOCKER & CATCHER



> FEATURES & SPECS

BLOCKER

- Canadian Made, Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro level performance.
- Dual density HD inner blocking board with PE for reduced weight and durability.
- HD Protection side hand plate.
- Reinforced Nash Palm with ventilated mesh gussets for breathability.
- HD Protection foam finger guards.

CATCHER

- Canadian Made, Custom Crafted Pro-Spec Construction for pro level performance.
- Glove design featuring a one-piece thumb/cuff for maximum coverage.
- 60 degree break angle with finger to thumb closure & game ready flex.
- SureGrip palm material for increase grip.
- Double tee for increased pocket size.
- Precision Fit Strapping System.

> SIZES AVAILABLE

INT 8" x 14" BLOCKER / 43" CATCHER

JR 7" x 13.5" BLOCKER / 41" CATCHER

YTH 7" x 12.5" BLOCKER / 39" CATCHER



NHL TEAM REPORTS

MONTREAL CANADIENS

ASPIRATIONS DUNE. But the Canadiens had no playoff aspirations. That gave Montreal reason to start its draft capital. As a result, the team's entire draft day with seven picks in the first three rounds — more than twice as many as any other club that was on-season action in 2024-25.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The arrival of new GMs provided an instant jolt to the attack. But for all the offense that Montreal has had on the wings, there's a significant lack of depth down the middle. There has been a top-committee approach to second-line center duty in Riley Duchi's absence, with Christian Dubeau and Alex Newhook primarily filling the void.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Duchi's repeated injury issues, finding stability and skill and depth at center can elevate the club.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Duchi is in the pen, post-injury defenseman with Lane Hultbom and Logan Hutvick. Add Karan-Goel to the equation, and the Canadiens' top three is set for the future.

CAP SITUATION: Jean-Philippe Lamontagne's development and the need for a shutdown-style defender, a force should be placed on overhauling a defense-first team that would complete the top five.

CAP SITUATION: Jean-Philippe Lamontagne's development and the need for a shutdown-style defender, a force should be placed on overhauling a defense-first team that would complete the top five.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

THE PREDATORS' season was defined by disappointment both in the playoffs and the offseason. The lack of success of their big-name offseason signings, which was an overhauling issue for Nashville's roster.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Roman Josi anchors the defense, and Steve Stamkos gives the back end further stability. But there's a lack of defensive depth in the prospect pool. Tanner McElrath was a standout at the 2023 world junior, and he could arrive in the NHL as soon as next season. But the Preds should consider spending some prize draft capital on the blueline.

CAP SITUATION: Nashville's overhauled cap commitment next season will be \$4.55 million.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: A prospect comes along, Jordan Kormanik to call his team in the AHL, this season after a strong performance in the AHL. The 2022 first-round pick could contribute in the middle-six and the second power-play unit.

CONTRACT TRACKER: Ryan Johansen, 30, 2024, 10 yrs @ \$10.5M; Matt Duchene, 30, 2024, 5 yrs @ \$8.5M; Ryan O'Reilly, 32, 2024, 5 yrs @ \$8.5M; Steve Stamkos, 33, 2024, 5 yrs @ \$10.5M; Roman Josi, 30, 2024, 5 yrs @ \$10.5M; Tanner McElrath, 20, 2024, 1 yr @ \$1.5M.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

IT WAS KEY. The Devils' key to success was their defense. The Devils' defense was the key to their success. The Devils' defense was the key to their success.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: The Devils' defense was the key to their success. The Devils' defense was the key to their success.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: The Devils' defense was the key to their success. The Devils' defense was the key to their success.

CAP SITUATION: The Devils' defense was the key to their success. The Devils' defense was the key to their success.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS

THE ISLANDERS' season was defined by disappointment both in the playoffs and the offseason. The lack of success of their big-name offseason signings, which was an overhauling issue for the Islanders' roster.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: The Islanders' defense was the key to their success. The Islanders' defense was the key to their success.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: The Islanders' defense was the key to their success. The Islanders' defense was the key to their success.

CAP SITUATION: The Islanders' defense was the key to their success. The Islanders' defense was the key to their success.

THIS SUMMER MARKS the 20th anniversary of the NHL salary cap, and it's sometimes still hard to believe the league and its players lost an entire season disputing its implementation. Before 2005-06, fans spent the off-season simply wanting their favorite team to improve. Just sign some good free agents at any cost and compete for the Cup. It was so basic, it was cute. In the 20 years since, fans — like NHL team GMs and cap-

ologists — navigate the summer walking the fine line of spending money wisely, knowing their team has a payroll ceiling and a competitive window. What hasn't changed before or after the advent of the cap is the importance of using the draft to stock the shelves with prospects who will eventually make their way to the NHL roster and help in the challenge of icing the best team within the confines of a budget. Fans and teams know the

value of having youngsters on entry-level contracts contribute to a winning formula. Draft Preview 2025 introduces you to some of these players. In the team section of DP, we spend a half-page on each club, assessing their immediate needs (next season), long-term needs (three to five years from now), salary-cap situation (the sensitive and finicky exercise of staying under the cap ceiling and/or using the extra space to aid the rebuild) and prospects

ready to step in. "In The System 2025-26" looks at the prospect or prospects most ready to contribute next season. The team sidebars this year are a GM snapshot: who are the best and worst draft selections made by each team's GM since he was hired, and which are the best and worst trades he's made. "Contract Tracker" looks at the best and worst value contracts on each team's roster, regardless of which GM made those signings. — BRIAN COSTELLO

GM SNAPSHOT



PAT VERBEEK

Hired: Feb. 2022 | **Drafts:** 3

ASTUTE PICKS: Tristan Luneau, 53rd, 2022; Yegor Sidorov, 85th, 2023

DUBIOUS PICKS: Nathan Gau-cher, 22nd, 2022; Nico Myatovic, 33rd, 2023

BEST TRADE: **IN** – 1st rd pick, 5th rd pick from Edm. **OUT** – Adam Henrique, Sam Carrick. March 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Dominik Simon, Zach Aston-Reese, Calle Clang, 2nd rd pick from Pit. **OUT** – Rickard Rakell. March 2022

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Leo Carlsson, 1 yr @ \$950K
Cutter Gauthier, 1 yr @ \$950K
Jackson LaCombe, 1 yr @ \$925K

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Jacob Trouba, 1 yr @ \$8M
Alex Killorn, 2 yrs @ \$6.25M
Ryan Strome, 2 yrs @ \$5M



ANAHEIM DUCKS

A SEVENTH consecutive season outside the playoffs has even the most patient of Anaheim's fans wondering how long the rebuild will take. The Ducks are still among the lowest-scoring teams in the NHL, and even though they flirted with .500 this season, the lack of offensive depth is a big red flag.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: A game-breaker. Look at Anaheim's cast of forwards, and you will see several promising youngsters and a handful of second-tier producers. You could make the case the Ducks don't have a single first-line NHL star, though a couple of players might achieve that status down the road. Anaheim needs to

sign a marquee difference-maker who can elevate the production of its respectable middle-six supporting cast.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Center depth. The Ducks have been among the worst faceoff teams for several seasons, and even though there are some impressive prospects in the system, none are centers. Mason McTavish and Leo Carlsson are the only centers with a long-range future in Anaheim. What this team wouldn't give for a young Ryan Getzlaf.

CAP SITUATION: Anaheim has a lot of cap space. In fact, with a rising salary floor, the Ducks will need to take on some big-ticket contracts – preferably in the form of



LEO CARLSSON

front-line UFA signings – with the deals for Jacob Trouba, John Gibson, Alex Killorn, Ryan Strome and Radko Gudas all coming off the books by the summer of 2027. Verbeek will surely be free-agent shopping.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Power winger Beckett Sennecke was the No. 3-ranked prospect in Future Watch 2025. He's an exceptional playmaker

and puckhandler who can step in and play heavy minutes at 19. Tristan Luneau is ready to join Anaheim's young crop of 'D.' He's gritty, talented and tough.

DID YOU KNOW: Fourteen Anaheim first-round picks are playing in the NHL, but only five – Carlsson, McTavish, Pavel Mintyukov, Trevor Zegras and Isac Lundestrom – are still with the Ducks. – **BRIAN COSTELLO**

GM SNAPSHOT



DON SWEENEY

Hired: May 2015 | **Drafts:** 10

ASTUTE PICKS: Brandon Carlo, 37th, 2015; Charlie McAvoy, 14th, 2016; Jeremy Swayman, 111th, 2017

DUBIOUS PICKS: Zach Senyshyn, 15th, 2015; Jakub Zboril, 13th, 2015; Urho Vaakanainen, 18th, 2017

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Charlie Coyle from Min. **OUT** – Ryan Donato, 5th rd pick. Feb. 2019

WORST TRADE: **IN** – 1st rd pick. **OUT** – Brad Marchand. March 2025

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

David Pastrnak, 6 yrs @ \$11.25M
Charlie McAvoy, 5 yrs @ \$9.5M
Hampus Lindholm, 5 yrs @ \$6.5M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Elias Lindholm, 6 yrs @ \$7.75M
Casey Mittelstadt, 2 yrs @ \$5.75M
Nikita Zadorov, 5 yrs @ \$5.0M



BOSTON BRUINS

IF THERE IS any good fortune to be found in Boston's sudden plummet to the Atlantic Division basement, it's that the Bruins didn't offload their 2025 first-round selection. The pick will be the Bruins' highest since they drafted Dougie Hamilton ninth overall in 2011.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Signing Nikita Zadorov to a long-term deal seemed ill-advised from the outset. Thankfully, the rising cap gives the Bruins a way to mitigate disaster by finding a defender who can displace Zadorov from the No. 3 spot on Boston's back end. If Zadorov is replaced by a stable veteran – preferably one with a stay-at-home bent – it also

gives Mason Lohrei more freedom to roam. That's a win-win situation for the B's.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: In David Pastrnak, Charlie McAvoy and Jeremy Swayman, the Bruins have stars up front, on the blueline and in goal. But years of sustained competitiveness have drained Boston's prospect pool. So, true as it may be that a future top-line pivot is a glaring need, it's just as important that the Bruins begin the arduous process of restocking the cupboard. That begins with compiling picks, and Boston having three first-round selections over the next two seasons, as well as four picks in the first three rounds this June, is a good starting point.



MASON LOHREI

CAP SITUATION: Even after the Bruins ink a handful of RFAs, including Lohrei and Morgan Geekie, there should be upward of \$15 million in cap space. Offloading backup Joonas Korpi and his \$3-million ticket would give the Bruins even more flexibility.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Fabian Lysell didn't set the world on fire during his third AHL

campaign. In fact, his scoring regressed. But he has pace and creativity, and those are attributes the Bruins need.

DID YOU KNOW: John Farinacci is the third member of his family to start his big-league career with the Bruins. His uncle Ted Donato and cousin Ryan Donato played a combined 574 games for Boston. – **JARED CLINTON**



BUFFALO SABRES

THE SABRES, WHO

haven't made the playoffs in 14 seasons, have had a top-15 pick each summer since 2012, all but three of which have been in the top 10. Buffalo has to find a way to parlay this stockpiling of promising prospects into something much more meaningful.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS:

Rasmus Dahlin, Owen Power and Bowen Byram make for a talented 'D' triumvirate. Landing a rearguard (or two) whose expertise is keeping the opposition off the board is how the Sabres take a step forward. That responsibility currently falls on Mattias Samuelsson, as there are no other shutdown specialists in Buffalo.

LONG-TERM NEEDS:

Buffalo has used five picks in the top 50 over the past three seasons to select centers. Tage Thompson has alternately been used as a center and winger on the top line, but finding him a playmaking pivot who can drive a line would take the attack to another level. Buffalo likes the look of Konsta Helenius, but the Sabres shouldn't rest until they find answers for the top two scoring lines.

CAP SITUATION:

The Sabres' projected cap space exceeds \$21 million, but on the docket for Buffalo are RFAs Byram, JJ Peterka, Jack Quinn and Ryan McLeod, all of whom registered career-best offensive numbers in 2024-25. Inking all four

would leave Buffalo with pocket change when it comes time to sign outside free agents.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Noah Ostlund exceeded expectations in his first full AHL campaign. He finished second among Rochester Americans forwards in points per game, an output that earned him an eight-game look with the Sabres. He's on the short list

to earn bottom-six duty in Buffalo next season.

DID YOU KNOW:

Like Johnny Cash, Norwin Panocha has been everywhere, man. Since starting the 2023-24 season with the Chicoutimi Saguenéens in the QMJHL, he's played for WHL Prince Albert, USHL Green Bay and DEL Berlin. He's also made his way to two WJCs. — JARED CLINTON



TAGE THOMPSON

NHL

GM SNAPSHOT



KEVYN ADAMS

Hired: June 2020 | Drafts: 5

ASTUTE PICKS: JJ Peterka, 34th, 2020; Jiri Kulich, 28th, 2022; Tyson Kozak, 193rd, 2021

DUBIOUS PICKS: Isak Rosen, 14th, 2021; Prokhor Poltapov, 33rd, 2021; Matthew Savoie, 9th, 2022

BEST TRADE: IN — Robert Hagg, 1st rd pick, 2nd rd pick from Phi. **OUT** — Rasmus Ristolainen. July 2021

WORST TRADE: IN — 3rd rd pick from Fla. **OUT** — Brandon Montour. April 2021

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Tage Thompson, 5 yrs @ \$7.14M
Alex Tuch, 1 yr @ \$4.75M
Jiri Kulich, 2 yrs @ \$887K

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Owen Power, 6 yrs @ \$8.35M
Jordan Greenway, 2 yrs @ \$4.0M
Connor Clifton, 1 yr @ \$3.33M



CALGARY FLAMES

THREE YEARS AFTER

the Flames included a first-round sweetener in the trade that sent broken-down Sean Monahan to Montreal in 2022, that deal continues to look worse and worse. Monahan has healed and re-invented his game to the point he was one of 35 point-per-game players in the NHL this season (min. 25 GP). And that pick going to Montreal is the 15th overall this summer. To make matters worse, Calgary badly needs a center exactly like Monahan.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS:

Center depth. The Flames were a bottom-three team in faceoff percentage, and GM Craig Conroy has been trying to acquire a right-shot pivot since he took

over the job. Mikael Backlund is nearing the end of his effectiveness, and Morgan Frost is best suited to the third line. A trade or free-agent signing is an off-season certainty.

LONG-TERM NEEDS:

Top-six centers. Nazem Kadri has been a top-flight pivot in his three seasons as a Flame, but he turns 35 in October, and the Flames have no promising centers in the system. Calgary has nine picks in the first three rounds of the next two drafts. Don't be surprised if five of those nine picks are centers.

CAP SITUATION:

The Flames have plenty of cap space with which to work. But they must be wary that Dustin Wolf, Kevin Bahl, Matt Coronato

and Connor Zary will require expensive new deals in the next 12 months. And if Calgary retains Rasmus Andersson, it's going to cost at least \$8 million per season. All that cap space could disappear quickly.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Flashy defenseman Zayne Parekh is just 19, but he should step right in and become a contender for the Calder. Left

winger William Stromgren will get a long look in camp.

DID YOU KNOW:

The Flames are truly a middling franchise. They have finished between 15th and 20th seven times in the past 11 seasons. Rarely good enough to slip into a playoff spot but not low enough to generate top-10 draft selections (just once since 2016). — BRIAN COSTELLO



ZAYNE PAREKH

NHL

GM SNAPSHOT



CRAIG CONROY

Hired: May 2023 | Drafts: 2

ASTUTE PICKS: Luke Misa, 150th, 2024; Aydar Suniev, 80th, 2023; Henry Mews, 74th, 2024

DUBIOUS PICKS: Jaden Lipinski, 112th, 2023; Samuel Honzek, 16th, 2023

BEST TRADE: IN — Kevin Bahl, 1st rd pick from NJ. **OUT** — Jacob Markstrom. June 2024

WORST TRADE: IN — Artem Grushnikov, 2nd rd pick from Dal. **OUT** — Chris Tanev. Feb. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Dustin Wolf, 1 yr @ \$850K
Martin Pospisil, 1 yr @ \$1M
Rasmus Andersson, 1 yr @ \$4.55M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

J. Huberdeau, 6 yrs @ \$10.5M
Y. Sharangovich, 5 yrs @ \$5.75M
Joel Farabee, 3 yrs @ \$5M

GM SNAPSHOT



ERIC TULSKY

Hired: June 2024 | **Drafts:** 1

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Mark Jankowski from Nsh. **OUT** – 5th rd pick, March 2025

WORST TRADE: **IN** – 3rd rd pick from T.B. **OUT** – Jake Guentzel, June 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Logan Stankoven, 1 yr @ \$814K

Jackson Blake, 1 yr @ \$906K

Pyotr Kochetkov, 2 yrs @ \$2.0M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Andrei Svechnikov, 4 yrs @ \$7.75M

Sean Walker, 4 yrs @ \$3.6M

Jesper Kotkaniemi, 5 yrs @ \$4.82M



CAROLINA HURRICANES



DESPITE BEING ONE

of the NHL's best

regular-season teams recently, Carolina made 10 picks in both 2023 and 2024. And its scouting department isn't afraid to look overseas. Only five of those players were from North America, while there were six Russians selected in 2024 alone and 11 in total over those two years combined. The Canes also don't shy away from drafting undersized prospects.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: With

Brent Burns and Dmitry Orlov both pending UFAs, the defense may look a lot different come autumn. Rookies Alexander Nikishin and Scott Morrow are the easy answers, but having already lost veteran

pieces, the blueline won't be as stacked as it once was.

LONG-TERM NEEDS:

Eventually, captain Jordan Staal will retire, and he'll take a lot of size out the door with him. Many of Carolina's best forwards are on the smaller or slighter side, from Sebastian Aho to Seth Jarvis to newbie Logan Stankoven. Andrei Svechnikov is a big boy, but in a league where heavy hockey tends to win championships, GM Eric Tulsy needs to think about where the beef is coming from down the line.

CAP SITUATION: Even as

they contend for Stanley Cups, the Canes are well-positioned under the cap, with more than \$35 million available. They do



ANDREI SVECHNIKOV

need to fill at least two blueline spots and either re-sign or replace forwards Jack Roslovic and Eric Robinson, but that's all manageable.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Nikishin is coming off another strong campaign in the KHL and he's ready for full-time duty in North America. A big, physical two-way defenseman, the 23-year-old will be an obvi-

ous Calder candidate to start the year. He arrived in Carolina during the playoffs, so he'll have some familiarity already.

DID YOU KNOW: After

two decent seasons at North Dakota, right winger Jayden Perron made the move to another NCAA blueblood program when he joined Michigan through the transfer portal in April. – RYAN KENNEDY

GM SNAPSHOT



KYLE DAVIDSON

Hired: March 2022 | **Drafts:** 3

ASTUTE PICKS: Oliver Moore, 19th overall, 2023; Frank Nazar, 13th, 2022

DUBIOUS PICKS: Kevin Korhinski, 7th, 2022; Paul Ludwinski, 39th, 2022

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Spencer Knight, 1st rd pick from Fla.

OUT – Seth Jones, 4th rd pick, March 2025

WORST TRADE: **IN** – A. Welinski, V. Saarijarvi, 2nd rd pick, 4th rd pick from NYR/Ari. **OUT** – Patrick Kane, Cooper Zech. Feb. 2023

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Connor Bedard, 1 yr @ \$950K

Frank Nazar, 1 yr @ \$950K

Alex Vlasic, 5 yrs @ \$4.6M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Jason Dickinson, 1 yr @ \$4.25M

Laurent Brossoit, 1 yr @ \$3.3M

T.J. Brodie, 1 yr @ \$3.75M



CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS



THE SEASON

closed with the rebuild beginning to bear fruit. Oliver Moore, Sam Rinzel, Ryan Greene and Artyom Levshunov are all first- or second-rounders from 2022 through 2024 and finished the year in Chicago, but the work will continue at the 2025 draft. After making 13 selections in the first or second rounds of the past three drafts, Chicago is slated to make four more such picks this year.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: There

are holes throughout the roster, though none are more evident than on the back end. The Hawks can rely on Connor Murphy and the underrated Alex Vlasic, but they would do well to avoid thrusting Levshunov

into a starring role or asking Rinzel to do too much too soon. Adding a skilled veteran 'D' will let the newcomers bed in slowly and play sheltered minutes when needed.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: With

another year left on his deal, goalie Spencer Knight has a chance to prove he can be the long-term No. 1. The Hawks also have Drew Commesso and Adam Gajan waiting in the wings, but quantity in the crease is not to be conflated with quality. Chicago's potential to return to its former heights will be tied to its ability to find an answer to the goaltending issues that have persisted since two-time Cup winner Corey Crawford departed in 2020.



SPENCER KNIGHT

CAP SITUATION: A 31-goal, 62-point career year puts Ryan Donato in line for a healthy raise. Working in the Hawks' favor, should they wish to retain Donato, will be their nearly \$31 million in cap room. Even if Chicago re-signs Donato, it will have the money to be a major player in the UFA market.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Kevin Korhinski had to take a

step back to have the chance to leap forward. After a rookie season with the big club in 2023-24, he spent most of 2024-25 in the AHL. He's in line for a full-time NHL return.

DID YOU KNOW: With 71

goals this year, Nick Lardis became the eighth player in OHL history – and just the third since 1990 – to reach the 70-goal plateau. – JARED CLINTON



COLORADO AVALANCHE



THERE WILL BE

chances to wheel and deal before and on the big day, but the Avalanche are staring down the possibility of hitting the draft floor with just two picks (fourth- and seventh-rounders) for the second time in four seasons. The lack of draft capital has taken a toll on the prospect pool, which is among the NHL's shallowest.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: It is both a feature and a bug of the Avs' attack that Nathan MacKinnon is tasked with carrying the club's forwards. He takes on more heavy lifting than any other offensive superstar, including Connor McDavid. But that is as much a by-product of Colorado's

modest supporting cast as it is MacKinnon's excellence. The club knows its star pivot needs help, and GM Chris MacFarland's deadline dealings made it evident that Colorado must hunt for a permanent second-line center and the wingers necessary to make the attack far less one-dimensional.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Mackenzie Blackwood's five-year extension is a bet on him as the answer in goal. But his track record is spotty. Colorado is led by an elite forward and game-breaking D-man, but goaltending will be a concern if Blackwood doesn't prove to be the long-term solution.

CAP SITUATION: Players with cap hits totalling more

than \$15.5 million come off the books this summer. But with Gabriel Landeskog returning, the Avs will have around \$9 million to spend. That will give them enough to take a swing at a second-tier UFA – perhaps a center – but not much else. If they do go big-game hunting, MacFarland will spend the rest of the off-season picking at the edges of the free-agent pool.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Oskar Olausson, the Avs' first-rounder in 2021, has had a brief NHL call-up in each of the past three seasons. Cap concerns will require the club to use low-cost options in the bottom six, and he'll be on the short list.

DID YOU KNOW: Cale Makar's brother, Taylor, inked an entry-level deal with Colorado on March 31. – JARED CLINTON



OSKAR
OLAUSSON

GM SNAPSHOT



CHRIS
MACFARLAND

Hired: July 2022 | Drafts: 2

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Mackenzie Blackwood, Givani Smith, 5th rd pick from SJ. **OUT** – Alexandar Georgiev, Nikolai Kovalenko, 2nd rd pick, 5th rd pick. Dec. 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Casey Mittelstadt from Buf. **OUT** – Bowen Byram. March 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Cale Makar, 2 yrs @ \$9.0M
Samuel Girard, 2 yrs @ \$5.0M
Scott Wedgewood, 1 yr @ \$1.5M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Charlie Coyle, 1 yr @ \$5.25M
Miles Wood, 4 yrs @ \$2.5M
Ross Colton, 2 yrs @ \$4.0M



COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS



FOR A TEAM

that nearly made the playoffs, Columbus is still poised to add solid assets with two first-round picks. Each of Columbus' picks in the 2024 draft – the first under GM Don Waddell – were North American, with the first three selections coming out of the WHL. That may be a coincidence, but 2023 was heavy in that direction, too, with only two Europeans.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Had the Blue Jackets turned to rookie goalie Jet Greaves a week or two earlier, they might have made the post-season. Greaves was fantastic down the stretch, while starter Elvis Merzlikins struggled to a .892 save percentage in 53 appearances.

Backup Daniil Tarasov had even worse numbers. Merzlikins is signed for two more years, and Tarasov is an RFA, so how does Columbus proceed? Melvin Strahl won't be ready for years.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: As good as Norris Trophy finalist Zach Werenski was on the blueline, Columbus struggled to keep the puck out of its net. A lot of that was on the goaltending, but the blueline could use some shoring up, especially if Ivan Provorov leaves via free agency. Denton Mateychuk has a bright future, and Charlie Elick is intriguing, but more 'D' weapons are needed.

CAP SITUATION: Waddell has tons of cash to splash this summer, with more than \$40

million available – though it's worth noting Columbus didn't spend to the limit this year. Provorov is an X-factor, and fellow D-man Dante Fabbro needs a new pact. Dmitri Voronkov is an RFA, and the big power forward deserves a healthy raise.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Two-way center Luca Del Bel Belluz brought secondary scoring in 15 appearances, while

Greaves was a difference-maker in 11 games. Both will help the team with bigger roles.

DID YOU KNOW: William Whitelaw, a 2023 third-rounder, is a Midwest expert. In consecutive years, he played in Minnesota (Shattuck-St. Mary's), Ohio (USHL Youngstown), Wisconsin (NCAA Badgers) and Michigan (NCAA Wolverines). – RYAN KENNEDY



JET
GREAVES

GM SNAPSHOT



DON
WADDELL

Hired: May 2024 | Drafts: 1

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Daemon Hunt, 1st rd pick, 2nd rd pick, 3rd rd pick, 4th rd pick from Min. **OUT** – David Jiricek, 5th rd pick Nov. 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Jordan Harris from Mtl. **OUT** – Patrik Laine, 2nd rd pick. Aug. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Kirill Marchenko, 2 yrs @ \$3.85M
Adam Fantilli, 1 yr @ \$950K
Kent Johnson, 2 yrs @ \$1.8M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Elvis Merzlikins, 2 yrs @ \$5.4M
Damon Severson, 6 yrs @ \$6.25M
Erik Gudbranson, 1 yr @ \$4.0M

GM SNAPSHOT



Hired: April 2013 | **Drafts:** 12

ASTUTE PICKS: Roope Hintz, 49th, 2015; Jason Robertson, 39th, 2017; Wyatt Johnston, 23rd, 2021
DUBIOUS PICKS: Julius Honka, 14th, 2014; Riley Tufte, 25th, 2016; Ty Dellandrea, 13th, 2018
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Chris Tanev from Cgy. **OUT** – Artem Grushnikov, 2nd rd pick, Feb. 2024
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Nils Lundkvist from NYR. **OUT** – 1st rd pick, 4th rd pick, Sept. 2022

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Thomas Harley, 1 yr @ \$4.0M
 Casey DeSmith, 2 yrs @ \$1.0M
 Esa Lindell, 5 yrs @ \$5.25M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Tyler Seguin, 2 yrs @ \$9.85M
 Matt Dumba, 1 yr @ \$3.75M

A WIN-NOW window with a talent-laden squad has led Stars GM Jim Nill to trade away picks, which has depleted the team's draft capital. However, Dallas' hit rate on draft day has been exceptional in recent years. Every top pick from 2017 to 2022 has seen significant NHL action, and the Stars have regularly converted outside the first round as well.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The face of the Stars' offense has changed over the past several seasons, and the transition is complete with the arrival of Mikko Rantanen and relegation of UFA-to-be Jamie Benn to bit-part player. But this hasn't reduced Dallas' need for the depth components who can

turn one of the West's best into perennial contenders.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Thomas Harley emerging as a legitimate top-pairing rearguard and Miro Heiskanen's sustained excellence give the Stars a locked-in 1-2 on the back end, with Esa Lindell perfectly suited as third in line. But even after Lian Bichsel made a compelling case for a larger role next season, Dallas will benefit from spending resources – at the draft and otherwise – to shore up the team's future on the second and third pairings.

CAP SITUATION: Benn's contract is set to expire, which means \$9.5 million comes off the books. The Stars need every dollar of that if they want

to make a play on any of their pending UFAs or dip into the market. Nill already did the bulk of the heavy lifting before the off-season began, with Rantanen locked in for eight years and Wyatt Johnston signed to a new five-year pact.

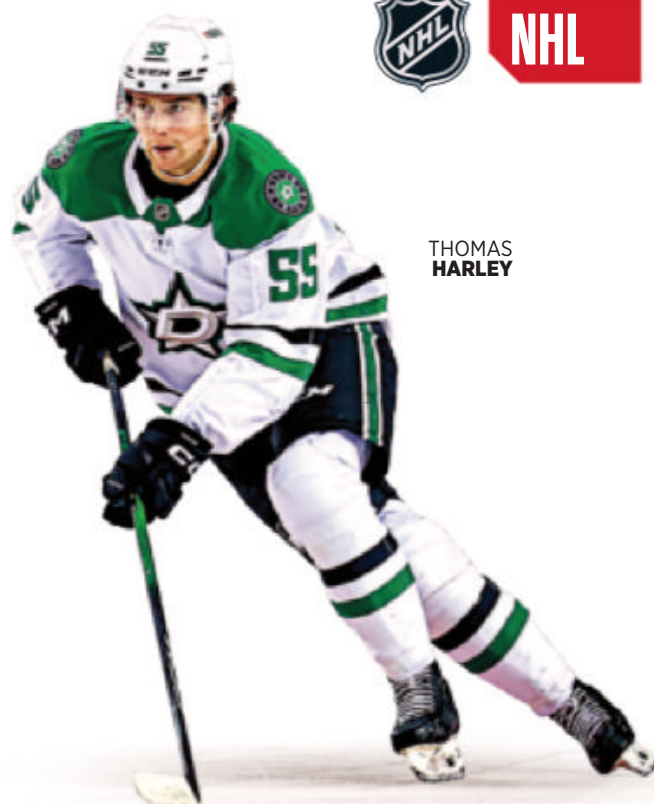
IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Consecutive stellar seasons in the AHL leave right winger Matej Blumel with nowhere

to go but up. His brief stint in Dallas this year was an audition for a bigger role in 2025-26.

DID YOU KNOW: Arno Tiefensee, selected 157th overall in 2023, is the highest-drafted German-born goalie since Philipp Grubauer went 112th in 2010. And not since 2007 has a German League netminder been taken higher than Tiefensee. – JARED CLINTON



NHL



THOMAS HARLEY

GM SNAPSHOT



Hired: April 2019 | **Drafts:** 6

ASTUTE PICKS: Moritz Seider, 6th, 2019; Lucas Raymond, 4th, 2020; Elmer Soderblom, 159th, 2019
DUBIOUS PICKS: William Wallinder, 32nd, 2020; Antti Tuomisto, 35th, 2019; Sebastian Cossa, 15th, 2021
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Alex DeBrincat from Ott. **OUT** – Dominik Kubalik, Donovan Sebrango, 1st rd pick, 4th rd pick, July 2023
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Future considerations from SJ. **OUT** – Jake Walman, 2nd rd pick, June 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Marco Kasper, 2 yrs @ \$887K
 Simon Edvinsson, 1 yr @ \$894K
 Lucas Raymond, 7 yrs @ \$8.08M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Andrew Copp, 2 yrs @ \$5.63M
 J.T. Compher, 3 yrs @ \$5.1M
 Justin Holl, 1 yr @ \$3.4M

DETROIT HAS BUILT a foundation for long-term success, and four picks in the first three rounds will only bolster the crop of kids. Amid a nine-year playoff drought, though, the mandate should be pushing for post-season hockey, not just adding to one of the league's best collections of prospects.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Simon Edvinsson's arrival bumped Ben Chiarot down the lineup, but the Red Wings could benefit from adding another blueliner on the left side. In an ideal world, a new addition would slide into second-pairing duty and provide stability to a defense corps who should be among the league's youngest.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Detroit is deep at center but thin on the wings, especially those who profile as premier playmaking types. Michael Brandsegg-Nygard fits the bill, but the Wings need more pure scorers who can play steady top-six minutes alongside Dylan Larkin and Marco Kasper. It's time to take big swings on high-skill skaters.

CAP SITUATION: The big concerns aren't even that big, as notable RFAs-to-be include Jonatan Berggren and Albert Johansson. Detroit will also have to weigh the cost of bringing back Patrick Kane, who finished fourth on the team in goals and points. With more than \$21 million in cap

space, Detroit has the money to retain its own free agents and bring in outside help, too.

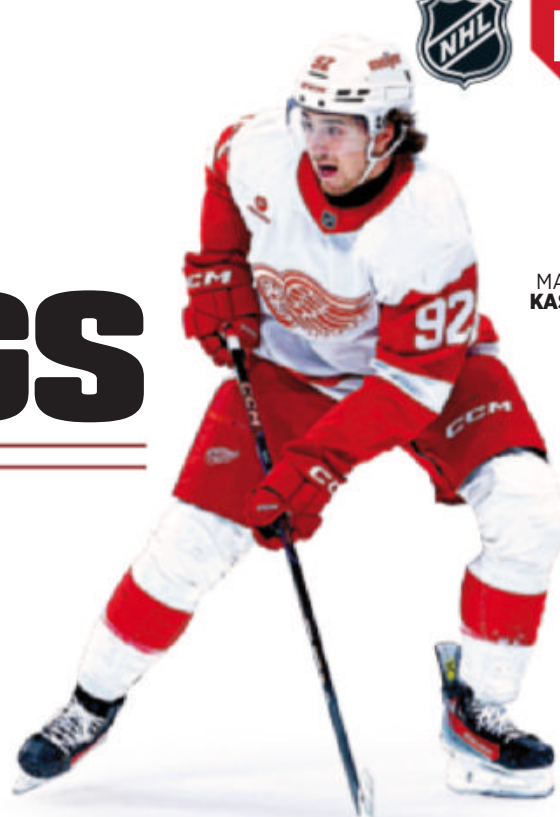
IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Axel Sandin-Pellikka was outstanding in his second full season in the Swedish League. He was also named the top defenseman at the WJC for a second straight year and looked ready for the big leagues after his late-season

AHL arrival. He'll be in the mix for NHL minutes next season.

DID YOU KNOW: The Buium family has churned out defensemen. Shai will vie for a spot on the Wings' blueline next year, while brother Zeev is Minnesota's top 'D' prospect. They followed the path of oldest sibling Ben, who wrapped up his playing days as a defender in 2021. – JARED CLINTON



NHL



MARCO KASPER



EDMONTON OILERS



EVAN BOUCHARD

FROM THE strange-but-true department: the second-youngest forward on the Oilers this season was a recently minted member of the NHL's 1,000-point club. Connor McDavid ranked as the second-youngest regular Oilers forward, behind only Vasily Podkolzin. That, and the dearth of early picks in the next couple of drafts, reinforces the idea that the Oilers must go all-in to win a Cup in the near future.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Goaltending and roster depth. Stuart Skinner simply can't be relied upon to be league-average or better. Solving that problem on a razor-thin budget is hard. The Oilers also must attract proven role players for lower in the

lineup – bottom-six forwards and another second-pair 'D.'

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Prospects for the system. When Leon Draisaitl turns 30 in October, he'll join a dozen other Edmonton regulars in that demographic. The Oilers are an older team with few blue-chip prospects in the system and no first-round pick until 2027. The scouting department will be relied upon to unearth hidden gems in the late rounds or the European free-agent front.

CAP SITUATION: The salary cap rising from \$88 million to \$95.5 million greatly benefits the Oilers. But would you believe it's not enough? Draisaitl's new deal kicks in, eating an additional \$5.5 million. And

the projected raise for Evan Bouchard is at least another \$4 million. Expiring buyouts and bonus overages open up \$4.3 million, while Jeff Skinner's \$3 million comes off the books.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Crafty center Matt Savoie came over from Buffalo in the Ryan McLeod deal and is ready to contribute. The No. 9 pick in 2022 got into a handful of NHL

games this year while putting up good numbers in the AHL.

DID YOU KNOW: Each of Edmonton's first-rounders from 2019 to 2022 is now gone. Philip Broberg (2019) and Dylan Holloway (2020) signed with St. Louis as RFAs. And Xavier Bourgault (2021) and Reid Schaefer (2022) were traded to Ottawa and Nashville. – **BRIAN COSTELLO**

GM SNAPSHOT



STAN BOWMAN

Hired: July 2024 | **Drafts:** 0

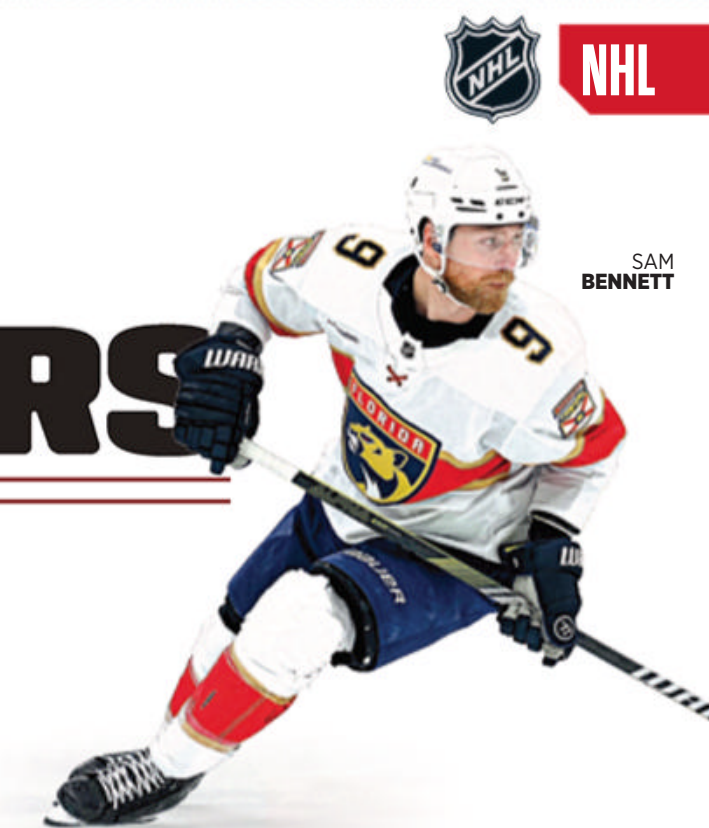
ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Vasily Podkolzin from Van. **OUT** – 4th rd pick. Aug. 2024
WORST TRADE: **IN** – 3rd rd pick from StL. **OUT** – Dylan Holloway. Aug. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Connor McDavid, 1 yr @ \$12.5M
Zach Hyman, 3 yrs @ \$5.5M
Mattias Ekholm, 1 yr @ \$6.25M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Darnell Nurse, 5 yrs @ \$9.25M
Viktor Arvidsson, 1 yr @ \$4M
Adam Henrique, 1 yr @ \$3M



FLORIDA PANTHERS



SAM BENNETT

DRAFT PICKS have a way of flying right out of a wide-open Stanley Cup window, and the Florida Panthers' draft-day outlook is the perfect example of why clubs are willing to mortgage their future for the present. Sure, the organization won't pick until the fourth round, but that's a price any team would pay to hang a championship banner in the rafters.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Regardless of what happens with pending UFA Aaron Ekblad, Florida needs to address its defensive depth. The bottom of the depth chart was the territory of Uvis Balinskis and Nate Schmidt this season. Balinskis is set to return, but

Florida could upgrade on Schmidt, who will be a UFA.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Florida has drafted goalies in each of the past six drafts, but there's not a true blue-chipper in the system. Among those goalies were Spencer Knight and Devon Levi, which would have set the Panthers up nicely for the future had they not shipped Levi to Buffalo in 2021 and Knight to Chicago ahead of this year's trade deadline. Now, the Panthers are staring down the end of Sergei Bobrovsky's NHL tenure – he'll be 37 next season – without an apparent successor.

CAP SITUATION: Beyond Ekblad, Florida has two notable pending UFAs: Sam Bennett

and Brad Marchand. Mackie Samoskevich is also in line for a bridge deal. Retaining all four players would likely eat up the team's projected \$19 million in cap space. Creative accounting or team-friendly deals are the only way that one or more of those players don't head out the door this summer.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Justin Sourdif could have

cracked the roster this season were it not for injury. He was second on AHL Charlotte in points per game. His next step is bottom-six duty in the NHL.

DID YOU KNOW: Florida traded into the second round of the 2024 draft to take Linus Eriksson, who scored goals in Sweden's junior, second-tier and top-tier leagues this season. – **JARED CLINTON**

GM SNAPSHOT



BILL ZITO

Hired: Sept. 2020 | **Drafts:** 5

ASTUTE PICKS: Anton Lundell, 12th, 2020; Devon Levi, 212th, 2020; Linus Eriksson, 58th, 2024
DUBIOUS PICKS: Evan Nause, 56th, 2021
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Sam Reinhart from Buf. **OUT** – Devon Levi, 1st rd pick. July 2021
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Claude Giroux, German Rubtsov, Connor Bunnaman, 5th rd pick from Phi. **OUT** – Owen Tippett, 1st rd pick, 3rd rd pick. March 2022

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Dmitry Kulikov, 3 yrs @ \$1.15M
Niko Mikkola, 1 yr @ \$2.5M
Gustav Forsling, 7 yrs @ \$5.75M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Carter Verhaeghe, 8 yrs @ \$7.0M
Sergei Bobrovsky, 1 yr @ \$10M

GM SNAPSHOT



KEN HOLLAND

Hired: May 2025 | **Drafts:** 0

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: N/A
WORST TRADE: N/A

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Adrian Kempe, 1 yr @ \$5.5M
 Jordan Spence, 1 yr @ \$1.5M
 Quinton Byfield, 4 yrs @ \$6.25M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Drew Doughty, 2 yrs @ \$11M
 Kyle Burroughs, 1 yr @ \$1.1M



LOS ANGELES KINGS

BUILT BY THE steady hand of outgoing GM Rob Blake, the Kings' roster has a nice balance. The team Ken Holland will take over has an impressive bell curve of veteran leaders (seven players over 30), young up-and-comers (six skaters aged 21 to 25) and a core of nine players in their primes, aged 26 to 30. The task now is to restock the depleted prospect pipeline.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Unheralded Vladislav Gavrikov played every game this season and averaged more than 23 minutes, ranking among the top 35 D-men league-wide. L.A. would love to keep the 29-year-old UFA around. If not, that's a key role that needs a replacement.

The same goes for winger Andrei Kuzmenko, who provided significant offensive contributions after arriving in March.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: It's folly to think the Kings can replace Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty when they age out in a few years simply by drafting well. It's just not that easy. But if Quinton Byfield and Brandt Clarke can eventually take over as the top center and No. 1 defenseman, then long-term options will open up further down the lineup.

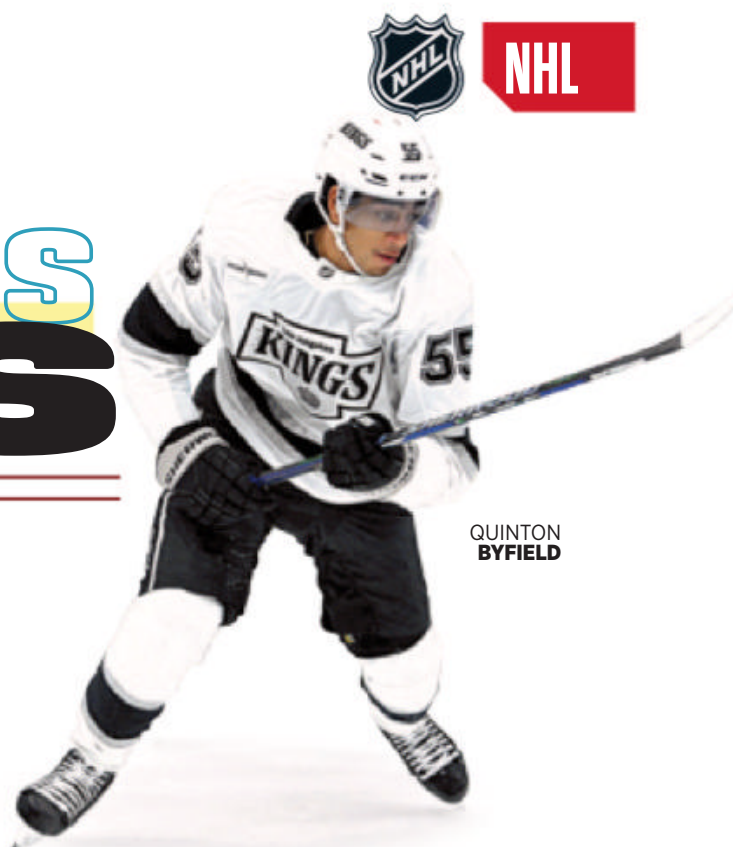
CAP SITUATION: L.A. solved two problems in one trade last summer, offloading unproductive Pierre-Luc Dubois and his inflated contract while also finding a stop-gap in the

crease with the return of Darcy Kuemper. The Kings don't have any unsavory contracts and are well-positioned to retain UFAs or sign others.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: If the Kings don't retain UFA David Rittich in net, there's an opening for either prospect Erik Portillo or journeyman Pheonix Copley. Winger Samuel Fagemo has been on

the cusp for several seasons.

DID YOU KNOW: The Kings are thrilled with their long-term outlook in the crease. Both 2023 draftee Hampton Slukynsky (U.S.) and 2024 pick Carter George (Canada) played very well at the 2025 world juniors. George is eligible to return next year, while Slukynsky will be a sophomore at Western Michigan. — **BRIAN COSTELLO**



QUINTON BYFIELD

GM SNAPSHOT



BILL GUERIN

Hired: Aug. 2019 | **Drafts:** 5

ASTUTE PICKS: Matt Boldy, 12th, 2019; Zeev Buium, 12th, 2024; Nikita Nesterenko, 172nd, 2019
DUBIOUS PICKS: Vladislav Firtsov, 42nd, 2019; Carson Lambos, 26th, 2021; Ryan O'Rourke, 39th, 2020
BEST TRADE: **IN** — Filip Gustavsson from Ott. **OUT** — Cam Talbot. July 2022
WORST TRADE: **IN** — 3rd rd pick from SJ. **OUT** — Ryan Donato. Oct. 2020

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Filip Gustavsson, 1 yr @ \$3.75M
 Matt Boldy, 5 yrs @ \$7.0M
 Frederick Gaudreau, 3 yrs @ \$2.1M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Jared Spurgeon, 2 yrs @ \$7.58M
 Yakov Trenin, 3 yrs @ \$3.5M



MINNESOTA WILD

DEFERRING PAYMENT on a handful of deals and the first-round pick spent to acquire 2022 No. 6 overall selection David Jiricek from Columbus mean the Wild will spend most of the 2025 NHL draft as spectators rather than active participants. Minnesota's second-rounder is its only pick in the first three rounds.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Wild's lack of offense without Kirill Kaprizov was jarring: their per-game scoring was down nearly half a goal in the 41 games he missed. The loss of Joel Eriksson Ek for extended periods also hurt. And it all speaks to a desperate need for improved secondary scoring. A prime-aged forward who can

drive a middle-six unit and chip in 20-plus goals would serve as a serious upgrade.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Minnesota had only three under-25 forwards who managed to find the scoresheet after the trade deadline this season: Matt Boldy, Marco Rossi and Liam Ohgren. There's hope 2022 first-rounder Danila Yurov can contribute in the future, but the Wild need to invest in offensive talent given their aging forward corps.

CAP SITUATION: After buying out Ryan Suter and Zach Parise and their twin 13-year, \$98-million deals in 2021, Minnesota was hamstrung by nearly \$15 million in dead cap space the past two seasons. That

goes down to \$1.6 million this summer, resulting in more than \$20 million in spending room. That's a chance to pursue UFAs in a way the Wild haven't been able to do in years.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: With his first taste of the NHL in the rearview, 2024-25 Hobey Baker finalist Zeev Buium will be ready to go for his rookie campaign. Quarterbacking the

second power-play unit and playing middle-pairing minutes isn't out of the question.

DID YOU KNOW: All-rookie QMJHL honors and a league-best GAA in 2019-20 weren't enough for Samuel Hlavaj to be drafted. His play overseas earned him an NHL deal, and he was named one of Slovakia's top players at the 2024 World Championship. — **JARED CLINTON**



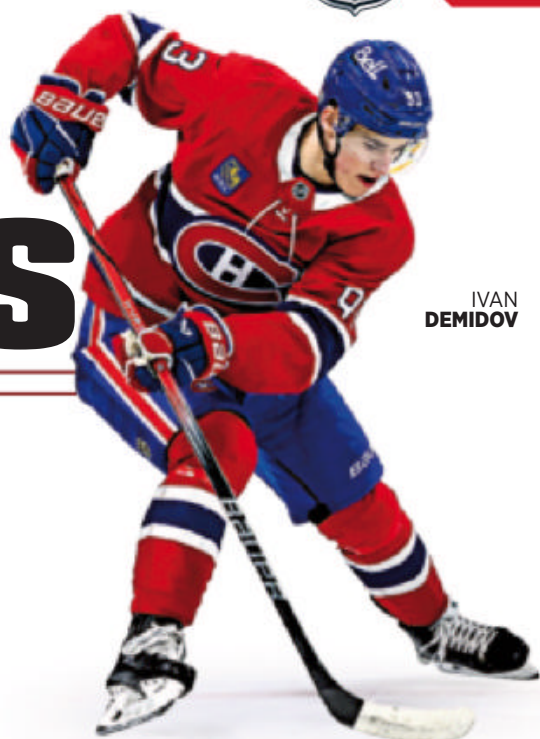
KIRILL KAPRIZOV



MONTREAL CANADIENS



NHL



IVAN
DEMIDOV

ASPIRATIONS? SURE.

But the Canadiens had no playoff expectations. That gave Montreal reason to store its draft capital. As a result, the Habs enter draft day with seven picks in the first three rounds – more than twice as many of any other club that saw post-season action in 2024-25.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The arrival of Ivan Demidov provided an instant jolt to the attack. But for all the offense that Montreal now has on the wings, there's a significant lack of depth down the middle. There has been a by-committee approach to second-line center duty in Kirby Dach's absence, with Christian Dvorak and Alex Newhook primarily filling the

role. Given Dach's repeated injury issues, finding stability and skill and depth at center can elevate the Habs.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Montreal is rich in young, puck-moving defensemen with Lane Huston and Logan Mailloux. Add Kai-den Guhle to the equation, and the Canadiens' top three is set for years to come. But given the hand-wringing about 2023 fifth-overall selection David Reinbacher's development and the need for a shutdown-style defender, a focus should be placed on unearthing a defense-first rearguard who would complete the top four.

CAP SITUATION: Juraj Slafkovsky, Jake Evans and Guhle already have extensions,

which leaves pacts needed for RFAs Emil Heineman, Jayden Struble and Jakub Dobes. With cap space projected at a shade less than \$9 million, Montreal has just enough budget to take care of those deals.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Owen Beck didn't play often during his 12-game audition, but he played well. He'll compete for fourth-line duty next

season, and the challenge of any bottom-six pivot is to make the most of limited ice time.

DID YOU KNOW: AHL goaltender Connor Hughes represented two nations in the same season. He backstopped Canada for one game at the 2022 Spengler Cup and then appeared three times for Switzerland in international competition. – JARED CLINTON

GM SNAPSHOT



KENT
HUGHES

Hired: Jan. 2022 | Drafts: 3

ASTUTE PICKS: Lane Huston, 62nd, 2022; Jacob Fowler, 69th, 2023; Ivan Demidov, 5th, 2024

DUBIOUS PICKS: Filip Mesar, 26th, 2022; David Reinbacher, 5th, 2023

BEST TRADE: IN – Sean Monahan, 1st rd pick from Cgy. OUT – Future considerations. Aug. 2022

WORST TRADE: IN – Alex Newhook from Col. OUT – Gianni Fairbrother, 1st rd pick, 2nd rd pick. June 2023

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Lane Huston, 1 yr @ \$950K
Ivan Demidov, 2 yrs @ \$941K
Sam Montembeault, 2 yrs @ \$3.15M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Brendan Gallagher, 2 yrs @ \$6.5M
Patrik Laine, 1 yr @ \$8.7M
Josh Anderson, 2 yrs @ \$5.5M



NASHVILLE PREDATORS



NHL



ROMAN
JOSI

THE PREDATORS'

season was defined by disappointment both in the team's results and the effectiveness of their big-name UFA signings. The setbacks have, however, opened the door for Nashville to stock up at the draft. The Predators can make franchise history with three first-round picks – their own and first-rounders from Tampa Bay and Vegas.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Big-money deals for top UFAs tied GM Barry Trotz's hands in his attempt to shock the roster back to life. As a result, Trotz's shake-up included dealing away relative youngsters Philip Tomasino and Juuso Parssinen. Now, Nashville has

to inject youth into the lineup, especially after the Predators iced one of the league's oldest squads. Perhaps some young legs can also help with team speed, which was an overarching issue for Nashville's roster.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Roman Josi anchors the blueline, and Brady Skjei gives the back end further stability, but there's a lack of defensive depth in the prospect pool. Tanner Molendyk was a standout at the 2025 world juniors, and he could arrive in the NHL as soon as next season. But the Preds should consider spending some prime draft capital on the blueline.

CAP SITUATION: Nashville's sixth-biggest cap commitment next season will be \$6.55 mil-

lion in dead space that resulted from buying out Matt Duchene in 2023. But Trotz will still have more than \$17 million at his disposal, and the only pressing cap concern is a new deal – likely a bridge contract – for RFA winger Luke Evangelista.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: A two-game cameo allowed Joakim Kemell to cut his teeth in the NHL this season after a

strong sophomore campaign in the AHL. The 2022 first-rounder could contribute in the middle-six and the second power-play unit.

DID YOU KNOW: Aiden Fink waited until the seventh-last pick to hear his name called at the 2023 draft. Since then, he's finished his NCAA campaigns as a Hobey Baker nominee and finalist. – JARED CLINTON

GM SNAPSHOT



BARRY
TROTZ

Hired: July 2023 | Drafts: 1

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: IN – 2nd rd pick from Min. OUT – Gustav Nyquist. March 2025

WORST TRADE: IN – Justus An-nunen, 6th rd pick from Col. OUT – Scott Wedgewood. Nov. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Ryan O'Reilly, 2 yrs @ \$4.5M
Zachary L'Heureux, 1 yr @ \$863K
Michael McCarron, 1 yr @ \$900K

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Steven Stamkos, 3 yrs @ \$8.0M
Brady Skjei, 6 yrs @ \$7.0M
Colton Sissons, 1 yr @ \$2.86M

GM SNAPSHOT



TOM FITZGERALD

Hired: Jan. 2020 | **Drafts:** 5

ASTUTE PICKS: Dawson Mercer, 18th, 2020; Seamus Casey, 46th, 2022; Luke Hughes, 4th, 2021

DUBIOUS PICKS: Alexander Holtz, 7th, 2020; Chase Stillman, 29th, 2021

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Johnathan Kovacevic from Mtl. **OUT** – 4th rd pick. June 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – 6th rd pick from SJ. **OUT** – Mackenzie Blackwood. June 2023

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Stefan Noesen, 2 yrs @ \$2.75M
Jacob Markstrom, 1 yr @ \$4.13M
Paul Cotter, 1 yr @ \$775K

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Ondrej Palat, 2 yrs @ \$6.0M
Kurtis MacDermid, 2 yrs @ \$1.15M
Timo Meier, 6 yrs @ \$8.8M



NEW JERSEY DEVILS

IT WAS KEY injuries that derailed New Jersey's Stanley Cup aspirations, so you can't knock the Devils for trading their 2025 first-rounder to get Jacob Markstrom last summer. The Devils still have six picks this year, and they have typically gone for balance in the draft: all leagues and nations represented while averaging one goalie per year over the past decade.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Jack Hughes injury exposed the Devils' lack of depth, as they struggled mightily against Carolina in the playoffs. There's not much high-end skill in AHL Utica, so New Jersey has to hope Europeans such as Arseni Gritsyuk or Lenni Hameenaho

can become big-league contributors in the near future.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Four regulars on the blueline are on the wrong side of 30, and the Dougie Hamilton era has been a rollercoaster due to injuries. Luke Hughes has already stepped up and looks like a star, but who will join him? Simon Nemec is one possibility, and Anton Silayev has tons of potential, but they still need to prove themselves.

CAP SITUATION: Ilya Kovalchuk's cap recapture is finally off the books, and there's now about \$12 million to play with. All the key Devils are under contract, with the exception of UFA backup goalie Jake Allen and RFA Luke Hughes. Hughes



LUKE HUGHES

appears due for a long-term deal rather than a bridge contract, but that could depend on whether the Devils want to go UFA hunting. Cody Glass is an intriguing RFA up front.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Nemec isn't Calder-eligible, but he did play more games in Utica than he did in New Jersey this season, and you know he doesn't want to go back to

the 'A' again. Seamus Casey dazzled in spot duty on the blueline when the Devils were in Europe, and he'll make a case for himself in the fall, too.

DID YOU KNOW: Matyas Melovsky won the fan-favorite award in QMJHL Baie-Comeau this year, but if the playmaking center ever needs to entertain further, he's also pretty good with a yo-yo. — RYAN KENNEDY

GM SNAPSHOT



LOU LAMORIELLO

Hired: May 2018 | **Drafts:** 7
Fired April 2025

ASTUTE PICKS: Noah Dobson, 12th, 2018; Isaiah George, 98th, 2022; Cole Eiserman, 20th, 2024

DUBIOUS PICKS: Oliver Wahlstrom, 11th, 2018; Bode Wilde, 41st, 2018; Ruslan Iskhakov, 43rd, 2018

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Oliver Kyllington, Calum Ritchie, 1st rd pick from Col. **OUT** – Brock Nelson, William Dufour. March 2025

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Two 2nd rd picks from Col. **OUT** – Devon Toews. Oct. 2020

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Anders Lee, 1 yr @ \$7.0M
Mathew Barzal, 6 yrs @ \$9.15M
Ilya Sorokin, 7 yrs @ \$8.25M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Anthony Duclair, 3 yrs @ \$3.5M
Pierre Engvall, 5 yrs @ \$3.0M
Scott Mayfield, 5 yrs @ \$3.5M



NEW YORK ISLANDERS

THE ISLES haven't had a full slate of picks since 2018. That was also the last time New York drafted an impact player (Noah Dobson), though 2024 first-rounder Cole Eiserman could change that. This year, the Islanders do indeed have seven picks, and if recent history is any indication, there will be at least one Finn and one NTDP product taken. But with Lou Lamoriello out as GM, they may take a new tack.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The lunchpail Isles have little dynamism in their lineup outside of Dobson and Mathew Barzal. Eiserman will help in a couple of years, but more reinforcements are needed. Winning the draft lottery and the right to

pick first overall will certainly help in that regard.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Outside of Barzal, Simon Holmstrom and Maxim Tsyplov, the key forwards are all 30 or older. Integrating youngsters has been a challenge. There are several high-end forwards available at the top of the 2025 draft, including local product James Hagens – though D-man Matthew Schaefer is the consensus No. 1. Either way, the Isles are set to inject much-needed talent into a system that ranked 23rd in Future Watch 2025.

CAP SITUATION: New York has about \$28 million to spend, and the biggest ticket will go to Dobson, an RFA. The mobile blueliner had a rough year but



NOAH DOBSON

is only one season removed from a 70-point campaign that earned him Norris Trophy votes. Otherwise, it's mostly mid-tier RFAs on the agenda. The one key UFA is 34-year-old right winger Kyle Palmieri.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Eiserman and Danny Nelson will likely stay in college, so it may be whomever the Isles take first overall or nothing

in terms of full-time 2025-26 rookies. Smooth-skating D-man Calle Odelius is an option, but a second year of AHL seasoning is more prudent.

DID YOU KNOW: Eiserman was linemates with Macklin Celebrini at Shattuck-St. Mary's and would've hooked up with him again at Boston University if Celebrini hadn't jumped right to San Jose. — RYAN KENNEDY



NEW YORK RANGERS

➤ IS IT THE drafting or the development? Despite picking first overall in 2020 and second in 2019, the Rangers didn't get a phenom – unless Alexis Lafreniere takes another couple of steps. Kaapo Kakko was traded, and New York is still primarily a veteran operation. The Rangers will have at least eight picks this summer, the most they've had since 2021. They also have the option of pushing the conditional first-rounder they sent away in the J.T. Miller trade to 2026, which would give them nine choices this summer.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The biggest complaint about this year's disappointing Rangers team was a lack of heart, espe-

cially down the stretch, when they had many chances to seize a wild-card spot. Will Cuylle is the right kind of guy, as is Brett Berard – if the team played him more. New bench boss and former Penguins coach Mike Sullivan will need more buy-in.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Igor Shesterkin isn't going anywhere, but the Rangers haven't drafted a goalie since 2021. Given how long stoppers take to develop, it would behoove them to take at least one in 2025. Jonathan Quick will be the backup again next year, but after that, Dylan Garand or Talyn Boyko could get a shot.

CAP SITUATION: With all of the key veterans locked in and less than \$10 million to play

with, GM Chris Drury will be concentrating on RFAs, particularly D-man K'Andre Miller. It wasn't a great year for Miller, so the negotiations will be interesting. Elsewhere, Cuylle needs a raise, and fan-favorite Matt Rempe is up for renewal.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Gabe Perreault is coming off a stellar NCAA career with Boston College that included a

trip to the Frozen Four and two gold medals with Team USA at the world juniors. He'll bring a ton of heady skill to the right wing, likely in the top six.

DID YOU KNOW: In the past five drafts, New York has selected five players who are 6-foot-6 or taller. The latest was OHL Flint left winger Nathan Aspinall, a fifth-round pick in 2024. – RYAN KENNEDY



WILL CUYLLE

GM SNAPSHOT



CHRIS DRURY

Hired: May 2021 | **Drafts:** 4

ASTUTE PICKS: Gabe Perreault, 23rd, 2023; Noah Laba, 111th, 2022; Drew Fortescue, 90th, 2023
DUBIOUS PICKS: Adam Sykora, 63rd, 2022; Jayden Grubbe, 65th, 2021
BEST TRADE: **IN** – 1st rd pick, 4th rd pick from Dal. **OUT** – Nils Lundkvist. Sept. 2022
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Andrew Copp, 6th rd pick from Wpg. **OUT** – Morgan Barron, 1st rd pick, 2nd rd pick, 5th rd pick. March 2022

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS: Braden Schneider, 1 yr @ \$2.2M
 Vincent Trocheck, 4 yrs @ \$5.63M
 Jonny Brodzinski, 1 yr @ \$788K
WORST VALUE DEALS: Mika Zibanejad, 5 yrs @ \$8.5M
 Chris Kreider, 2 yrs @ \$6.5M
 Igor Shesterkin, 8 yrs @ \$11.5M



OTTAWA SENATORS

➤ THE SENATORS' seven-year playoff drought that preceded 2024-25 should have provided the franchise with a deep prospect pool. However, some notable swings and misses over the past several seasons – most notably whiffing on Tyler Boucher with the No. 10 overall pick in 2021 – have instead left the cupboards relatively bare.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Turning the Senators from a squad stuck on the post-season bubble into a perennial post-season outfit will come down to improving the bottom six. The top-end skill thins out after Tim Stutzle, Brady Tkachuk, Drake Batherson and Dylan Cozens, and few teams win

consistently on the strength of only a handful of attackers. With extra punch on the third and fourth lines, the Sens would immediately become much more difficult to defend.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Boucher's development woes and shipping out Zack Ostapchuk at the trade deadline have left the Senators thin on the wings. Ottawa leaned on veterans Claude Giroux and David Perron to round out the top six in 2024-25, but they're not long-term solutions. Elevating the offense is reliant upon finding linemates who can excel alongside Stutzle and Cozens.

CAP SITUATION: The Sens are projected to have nearly \$19 million in cap space, and

37-year-old Giroux is the only pending UFA – or RFA, for that matter – in line to carry a big ticket. Even if Giroux re-signs for one-third of the available budget, the team is well-positioned to address roster needs.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: It's best to exercise cautious optimism as it pertains to Leevi Merilainen, but his 12 appearances in net were inspired.

Bringing the 22-year-old in as an understudy to Linus Ullmark has the potential to pay dividends down the line.

DID YOU KNOW: Tristen Robins was born in 2001, while his father, Trevor, was finishing up his playing days with the London Knights – not the OHL club but the team in the now-defunct British Ice Hockey Superleague. – JARED CLINTON



TIM STUTZLE

GM SNAPSHOT



STEVE STAIOS

Hired: Dec. 2023 | **Drafts:** 1

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Linus Ullmark from Bos. **OUT** – Joonas Korpi-salo, Mark Kastelic, 1st rd pick. June 2024
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Future considerations from StL. **OUT** – Mathieu Joseph, 3rd rd pick. July 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS: Drake Batherson, 2 yrs @ \$4.98M
 Jake Sanderson, 7 yrs @ \$8.05M
 Tim Stutzle, 6 yrs @ \$8.35M
WORST VALUE DEALS: David Perron, 1 yr @ \$4.0M
 Dylan Cozens, 5 yrs @ \$7.1M
 Thomas Chabot, 3 yrs @ \$8.0M

GM SNAPSHOT



DANIEL BRIERE

Hired: May 2023 | **Drafts:** 2

ASTUTE PICKS: Matvei Michkov, 7th, 2023

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Nikita Grebenkin, 1st rd pick from Tor.

OUT – Scott Laughton, 4th rd pick, 6th rd pick. March 2025

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Erik Johnson from Buf. **OUT** – 4th rd pick. March 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Matvei Michkov, 2 yrs @ \$950K
Bobby Brink, 1 yr @ \$1.5M
Jamie Drysdale, 1 yr @ \$2.3M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Sean Couturier, 5 yrs @ \$7.75M
Rasmus Ristolainen, 2 yrs @ \$5.1M
Ivan Fedotov, 1 yr @ \$3.28M



PHILADELPHIA FLYERS



WITH DANIEL BRIERE

as GM, it's no surprise the Flyers have not discriminated over height in the past two drafts. Matvei Michkov, Jett Luchanko, Denver Barkey and Alex Ciernik are all sub-six-footers. With three first-round picks and four second-rounders in 2025, this draft could be massive for Philadelphia.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Flyers needed goaltending yesterday, so an answer cannot come soon enough. Out of 103 goalies who played in the NHL this year, all three of Philly's stoppers finished in the bottom 15 in goals saved above expected. Samuel Ersson was dead last, giving up 19.9 goals more than he should have. Their top

netminding prospect, Egor Zavragin, is still a teenager.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Michkov is clearly a talent, but the fact remains Philadelphia didn't have a single point-per-game regular in its lineup. High-end skill is needed to take the next step, and while there are some interesting roster pieces, it hasn't been enough to secure a spot in the post-season. Nailing the first round in 2025 will be key in this respect.

CAP SITUATION: The John Tortorella era is over, which may help attract free agents. At the least, it should help negotiations with RFA Cam York. Briere has around \$24 million of cap space to work with and no key UFAs. Other RFAs

include Noah Cates, Tyson Foerster and Jakob Pelletier. If the Flyers want to add talent, they'll have the opportunity.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

After helping Western Michigan win an NCAA title, big and skilled Alex Bump started his pro career in style by scoring at a point-per-game pace for AHL Lehigh Valley. Defenseman Oliver Bonk will be one to watch

as well, while Luchanko will attempt to make the Flyers out of training camp for a second straight year.

DID YOU KNOW: When the Flyers signed free-agent winger Karsen Dorwart out of Michigan State, they got a two-sport athlete. He's also a chess player who was good enough to get invited to a state tournament as a kid. – RYAN KENNEDY



MATVEI MICHKOV

GM SNAPSHOT



KYLE DUBAS

Hired: August 2023 | **Drafts:** 1

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – 2nd rd pick, 4th rd pick from Wpg. **OUT** – Luke Schenn. March 2025

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Michael Bunting, Vasily Ponomarev, Ville Koivunen, Cruz Lucius, 2nd rd pick, 5th rd pick from Car. **OUT** – Jake Guentzel, Ty Smith. March 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Sidney Crosby, 2 yrs @ \$8.7M
Rickard Rakell, 3 yrs @ \$5.0M
Bryan Rust, 3 yrs @ \$5.13M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Tristan Jarry, 3 yrs @ \$5.38M
Erik Karlsson, 2 yrs @ \$10.0M
Ryan Graves, 4 yrs @ \$4.5M



PITTSBURGH PENGUINS



AFTER YEARS OF

having fewer than the standard seven selections, the Penguins are flush in 2025. Pittsburgh is poised for a big draft weekend, with up to 11 picks, including three third-rounders and potentially two firsts. That gives GM Kyle Dubas and his longtime scouting buddy, Wes Clark, plenty of ammo. Clark has typically been willing to give smaller players a go, as long as they have skill.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: This season's Penguins featured middling offense and terrible defense and goaltending. While they already have some netminders in the system, any kind of skater would be helpful. Most glaring is a lack of

high-end skill outside of Sidney Crosby. The Penguins didn't have any players in the top 60 in Future Watch 2025.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Once Erik Karlsson and Kris Letang are gone, the Penguins will need to find skill for the blueline. Joona Vaisanen had a great freshman season with Western Michigan, and Harrison Brunicke and Emil Pieninemi have potential. But none of those kids are guarantees yet, so it would be wise to search for more future replacements.

CAP SITUATION: A lot of guys are locked in. That would be great – if this wasn't a lineup that's missed the playoffs the past three seasons. With around \$23 million in space,

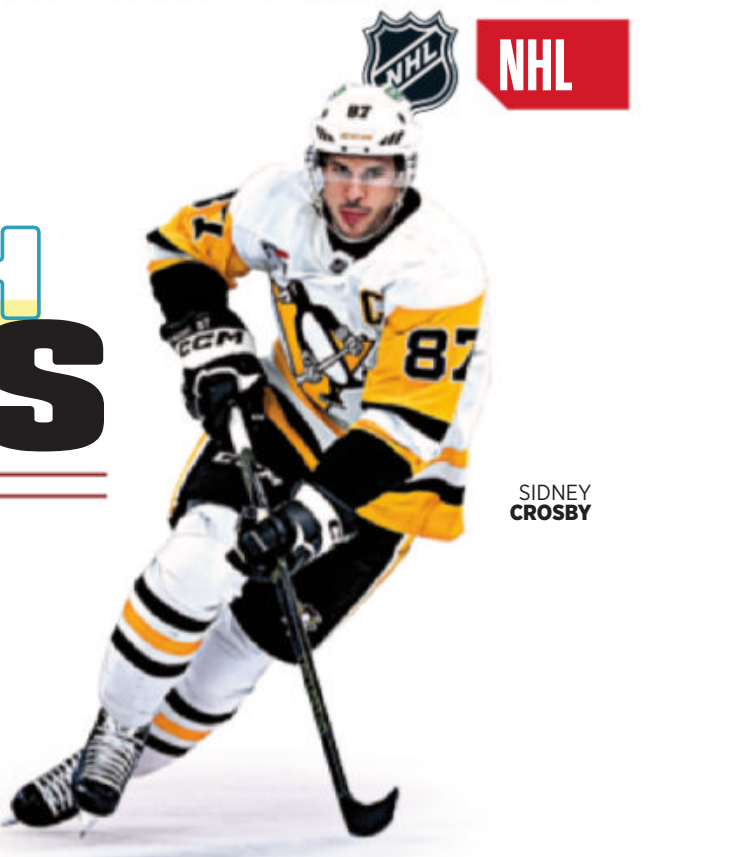
Dubas does have room to improve the squad, as the only UFAs are Matt Nieto and Matt Grzelcyk. RFAs include Connor Dewar, Philip Tomasino, P.O. Joseph and Conor Timmins.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Ville Koivunen, acquired in the Jake Guentzel trade, made the most of his eight NHL games this season by posting seven assists. The skinny Finn was

also a monster in the AHL as the leading scorer for W-B/Scranton. Rutger McGroarty will get another shot, too.

DID YOU KNOW: Fourth-rounder Chase Pietila played his freshman season at Michigan Tech with three other Pietilas: his brothers, Logan and Blake, and cousin Jed. This season, Chase was the only one left. – RYAN KENNEDY



SIDNEY CROSBY



ST. LOUIS BLUES



NHL



JIMMY
SNUGGERUD



THERE WILL BE no crying over the lost second- and third-round selections in the draft, as that was the cost of doing great business. The picks were sent to Edmonton as a result of St. Louis' offer sheets for Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg. Both were superb for the Blues this year, and St. Louis will take the NHL-ready talent over the pick-and-pray associated with choices outside the first round.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: How about an overhaul of the bottom six? Save for Oskar Sundqvist, it's reasonable for St. Louis to seek upgrades on every veteran who saw regular minutes on the third and fourth lines. Doing so would

take some of the onus off the top six.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: The average age of the Blues' top six defensemen by per-game ice time this season was 32. So, while acquiring Broberg was a step toward bracing the blueline, there's more that needs to be done. Fortunately, the Blues used each of their first three picks last year on defensemen, including No. 16 overall selection Adam Jiricek. Targeting rearguards at the top end of the draft should remain a priority.

CAP SITUATION: Once they re-sign RFA goalie Joel Hofer – a bridge deal with an eye toward him being the future starter seems likely – the Blues

will have about \$6 million with which to work. That is not a king's ransom, but it's enough given there are no major pending UFAs, as the only notable player coming off the books is 40-year-old Ryan Suter.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Season-closing cameos from Jimmy Snuggerud and Dalibor Dvorsky gave an early glimpse into a bright future

for the Blues. The duo were the eighth- and 12th-ranked prospects in our Future Watch 2025 issue.

DID YOU KNOW: In a season in which he posted the fourth-best save percentage in the AHL, Colten Ellis also made time to jet off to the Spengler Cup. The 24-year-old backstopped Canada to the semifinal. – JARED CLINTON

GM SNAPSHOT



DOUG
ARMSTRONG

Hired: July 2010 | Drafts: 14

ASTUTE PICKS: Colton Parayko, 86th, 2012; Jordan Binnington, 88th, 2011; Vince Dunn, 56th, 2015

DUBIOUS PICKS: Dominik Bokk, 25th, 2018; Jordan Schmaltz, 25th, 2012; Tommy Vannelli, 47th, 2013

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Cam Fowler, 4th rd pick from Ana. **OUT** – Jeremie Biakabutuka, 2nd rd pick, Dec. 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Zach Dean from Veg. **OUT** – Ivan Barbashev, Feb. 2023

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS: Dylan Holloway, 1 yr @ \$2.29M
Nathan Walker, 1 yr @ \$775K
Tyler Tucker, 2 yrs @ \$925K

WORST VALUE DEALS: Mathieu Joseph, 1 yr @ \$2.95M
Nick Leddy, 1 yr @ \$4.0M
Pavel Buchnevich, 6 yrs @ \$8.0M



SAN JOSE SHARKS



NHL



MACKLIN
CELEBRINI



THEY SAY THE winters in San Jose are nice. If that's what GM Mike Grier is telling prospective Sharks in the summer, that could be a "wink, wink, nudge, nudge" that, come springtime, San Jose will trade them to a Cup contender as the rebuild runs its course. That's been the fate of Mikael Granlund, Cody Ceci, Jake Walman, Mackenzie Blackwood, Anthony Duclair, Nick Bonino and others as they were dealt for picks and prospects.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Like every other summer since Grier took over in 2022, the Sharks will do their best to bring in veteran support to shelter the youngsters rising through the system. They'll likely add a

couple of reliable middle-six forwards and second-pair defensemen on short-term deals.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: With Macklin Celebrini, Will Smith and William Eklund being the foundational forwards, San Jose is looking for another pillar on defense to bookend Sam Dickinson. Ideally, it's Matthew Schaefer, if the New York Islanders go in a different direction with the No. 1 pick. The Sharks could use another A-list prospect or two along the blueline to make that an area of organizational strength.

CAP SITUATION: The Sharks have both the cap space and roster spots to go UFA hunting. They'd be wise to offer just a couple of years on those deals

to make those players easier to move later on.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Dickinson doesn't turn 19 until June, and he must play another year of major junior before being eligible for the AHL. But after three seasons with OHL London, he's ready for the bar to be raised. Perhaps he steps into a sheltered blueline role, then takes a December leave to

represent Canada at the WJC again. Yaroslav Askarov will become 1A or 1B in the crease for the whole season.

DID YOU KNOW: The Sharks have had nine picks in each of the past five drafts for a total of 45. That's 10 more than the average NHL team. They have nine picks again in 2025. Grier is basing their rebuild on that draft breadth. – BRIAN COSTELLO

GM SNAPSHOT



MIKE
GRIER

Hired: July 2022 | Drafts: 3

ASTUTE PICKS: Quentin Musty, 26th, 2023; Sam Dickinson, 11th, 2024; Luca Cagnoni, 123rd, 2023

DUBIOUS PICKS: Filip Bystedt, 27th, 2022

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Jake Walman, 2nd rd pick from Det. **OUT** – Future considerations. June 2024

WORST TRADE: **IN** – 4th rd pick from Veg. **OUT** – Adin Hill, Aug. 2022

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS: Macklin Celebrini, 2 yrs @ \$975K
Will Smith, 2 yrs @ \$950K
William Eklund, 1 yr @ \$863K

WORST VALUE DEALS: Marc-Edouard Vlasic, 1 yr @ \$7M
Alexander Wennberg, 1 yr @ \$5M
Barclay Goodrow, 2 yrs @ \$3.64M

GM SNAPSHOT



JASON BOTTERILL

Hired: April 2025 | **Drafts:** 0

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: N/A
WORST TRADE: N/A

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Jared McCann, 2 yrs @ \$5M
 Shane Wright, 2 yrs @ \$886K
 Eeli Tolvanen, 1 yr @ \$3.48M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Philipp Grubauer, 2 yrs @ \$5.9M
 C. Stephenson, 6 yrs @ \$6.25M
 Andre Burakovsky, 2 yrs @ \$5.5M



SEATTLE KRAKEN

A YEAR AGO, a match involving the Kraken was the lowest-event game in the league. They were in the bottom five in offense and top 10 in defense. On average, only 5.44 goals were scored. The good news is that Seattle scored 31 more goals this season than in 2023-24. The bad news is they allowed 30 more goals and dropped from 25th in the standings to 27th.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Kraken lack a game-breaking forward. To compensate, they're going to need more balanced scoring and offensive contributions from three lines. Jaden Schwartz had his most productive scoring season in nearly a decade, and Shane

Wright was terrific in his first full NHL campaign. But Matty Beniers struggled with consistency. They'd love to acquire a first-line forward.

LONG-TERM NEEDS:

Seattle's top four veteran defenseman are locked in for two-plus seasons. But at an average age of 31, they're not young anymore. Ryker Evans was impressive in his first full season, but of Seattle's top 10 prospects, none are blueliners. In fact, of 14 draft picks in the first two rounds over the past four years, only Evans and Lukas Dragicevic are defensemen.

CAP SITUATION: The Kraken have nearly \$22 million in cap space to fill eight or nine roster spots. With Evans and Kaapo

Kakko expected to sign affordable bridge deals, look for Seattle to try to bring in one big-ticket forward.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Center Berkly Catton has posted back-to-back 100-point WHL seasons. The No. 8 overall pick in 2024 is exactly what the offense needs, but will Seattle rush him into the lineup at 19? If not, 2022 second-rounder

Jani Nyman is close. He was second among AHL rookies with 28 goals in 58 games.

DID YOU KNOW: The four-year-old Kraken haven't had any growing pains in the AHL. One shared season with Florida in Charlotte in 2021-22 followed by three seasons as the Coachella Valley Firebirds has resulted in a league-best 173-81-34 record. — **BRIAN COSTELLO**



RYKER EVANS

GM SNAPSHOT



JULIEN BRISEBOIS

Hired: Sept. 2018 | **Drafts:** 6

ASTUTE PICKS: Gage Goulet, 62nd, 2020; Isaac Howard, 31st, 2022; Maxwell Crozier, 120th, 2019
DUBIOUS PICKS: Nolan Foote, 27th, 2019
BEST TRADE: **IN** — Nick Paul from Ott. **OUT** — Mathieu Joseph, 4th rd pick, March 2022
WORST TRADE: **IN** — Tanner Jeannot from Nsh. **OUT** — Cal Foote, 1st rd pick, 2nd rd pick, 3rd rd pick, 4th rd pick, 5th rd pick, Feb. 2023

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
 Brandon Hagel, 7 yrs @ \$6.5M
 Nikita Kucherov, 2 yrs @ \$9.5M
 Emil Lilleberg, 2 yrs @ \$800K
WORST VALUE DEALS:
 Conor Sheary, 1 yr @ \$2.0M
 Ryan McDonagh, 1 yr @ \$6.75M



TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

THE LIGHTNING will hit the draft floor in possession of only two of their own choices — picks in the fifth and seventh rounds — and won't have a first-round selection for the fifth time in six seasons. The Bolts' strategy? Make up for the lack of top-end draft capital in the aggregate. Beyond their own draft picks, they've acquired five more, including three additional seventh-rounders, to bring their total to seven selections.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The cap situation necessitated trading Mikhail Sergachev to Utah last summer, but that swap makes the defense reliant on Victor Hedman and Ryan McDonagh to a fault. The number of

minutes heaped on the top two rearguards is a major concern. If the Lightning don't get a viable third option who can reliably play 20 minutes, the blueline is liable to come crashing down at any moment.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: It's not just that the Lightning lack an heir apparent to Andrei Vasilevskiy; it's that they don't have a single goaltending prospect who will be NHL ready in the next five years. There's nothing stopping the Bolts from exploring the UFA market when Vasilevskiy's time comes to an end — he turns 31 this summer — but a homegrown option would provide cost control.

CAP SITUATION: The roughly \$8 million in cap space

projected to be available to the Lightning this summer would present a greater challenge if they were at risk of losing any major pieces. Thankfully, there's no heavy lifting to be done.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26:

Dylan Duke finished among the top 15 AHL rookie scorers, and his impressive transition to the pro game earned him a two-game NHL audition. There's

a lack of middle-six opportunity in Tampa Bay, but Duke's willingness to get physical and do the little things will get him a look at the bottom of the Lightning lineup.

DID YOU KNOW: Defenseman Jan Golicic, selected 118th overall in 2024, was the first Slovenian player drafted since 2017 and only the fourth in the past 20 years. — **JARED CLINTON**



VICTOR HEDMAN



TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

THE MAPLE LEAFS enter the draft without a first-round selection for the third time in five seasons, but Toronto has had recent success with its first pick. In 2019, 2021 and 2022, the three most recent instances in which the Leafs were without a first-round choice, Toronto managed to nab Fraser Minten, Matthew Knies and Nick Robertson in the second round.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: With Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, William Nylander, John Tavares and Knies, Toronto has one of the NHL's most talented top-six units. But those five are also the only Leafs forwards who posted more than half a point per game. That's indica-

tive of the lack of consistent middle-six scoring. Diversifying the attack will alleviate some of the pressure on the stars.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Not since Morgan Rielly has Toronto drafted and developed an anchor defenseman. Eventually, the Maple Leafs will need their next young, top-pairing rearguard who can lead the blueline into the future. They did spend their first-round pick in 2024 on defender Ben Danford, but there is not yet that blue-chip, can't-miss D-man in the prospect pool.

CAP SITUATION: There is a Marner-sized asterisk attached to the Maple Leafs' nearly \$27 million in projected cap space. Retaining the pending UFA

will cost upward of \$12 million. That will leave somewhere in the neighborhood of \$14 million to re-sign Knies, Tavares, Robertson and others.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Though Easton Cowan didn't reach the same heights in 2024-25 that he did the season prior, he was still a top-15 OHL producer on a per-game basis. He's one good camp away

from making the Leafs' roster.

DID YOU KNOW: A pickup game at a Blake Smith family reunion would be star-studded. His father, Derrick, played in the NHL, brother Dalton plays in the AHL, and his uncles and cousins include Keith, Wayne and Cayden Primeau. Smith was signed as an undrafted UFA out of Flint (OHL) in April. — **JARED CLINTON**



NHL



MITCH
MARNER

GM SNAPSHOT



BRAD
TRELIVING

Hired: May 2023 | **Drafts:** 2

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: **IN** — Brandon Carlo from Bos. **OUT** — Fraser Minten, 1st rd pick, 4th rd pick. March 2025
WORST TRADE: **IN** — Scott Laughton, 4th rd pick, 6th rd pick from Phi. **OUT** — Nikita Grebenkin, 1st rd pick. March 2025

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Anthony Stolarz, 1 yr @ \$2.5M
Simon Benoit, 2 yrs @ \$1.35M
Bobby McMann, 1 yr @ \$1.35M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Ryan Reaves, 1 yr @ \$1.35M
David Kampf, 2 yrs @ \$2.4M
Max Domi, 3 yrs @ \$3.75M



UTAH MAMMOTH

BY COMPARISON, the 2025 draft is going to be a snore for Utah's scouting staff. The club made 11 picks last June but will only have six selections at its disposal this summer. That doesn't mean Utah GM Bill Armstrong won't be active — he made three deals on the draft floor last year.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: There's room for improvement on the blueline. As it stands, one of Ian Cole or Olli Maatta will be taking steady second-pairing minutes next season. Either can do the job in a pinch, but given the franchise has missed the playoffs 12 of the past 13 seasons dating back to its days as Arizona, Utah needs more than merely "good enough."

LONG-TERM NEEDS: After giving Karel Vejmelka a long-term extension, Utah has pinned its hopes on him proving this season, not the three prior, will be his new standard. Regardless, it would be wise for the organization to invest in its crease. Though Michael Hrabal's play at UMass this year was tremendous — he ranked ninth in save percentage among NCAA goalies to play at least 30 games — long is the list of keepers who struggled to turn major-junior or collegiate excellence into NHL success. Better to fortify the blue paint now than be left wanting down the line.

CAP SITUATION: With more than \$22 million at its disposal,

Utah enters the summer with plenty of flexibility. That said, Armstrong needs to keep in mind that Barrett Hayton and Logan Cooley will both become RFAs ahead of 2026-27. Cap space must be earmarked for those extensions.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Armstrong said in April there's a "good chance" 2023 first-rounders Dmitriy Simashev and

Danil But will arrive from Russia ahead of next season. Both have KHL experience and could jump straight to the big club.

DID YOU KNOW: Tij Iginla, son of Hall of Famer Jarome, could be the first of three siblings to put their stamp on pro hockey. Brother Joe plays for WHL Edmonton, while sister Jade is in her third NCAA season at Brown. — **JARED CLINTON**



NHL



LOGAN
COOLEY

GM SNAPSHOT



BILL
ARMSTRONG

Hired: Sept. 2020 | **Drafts:** 4

ASTUTE PICKS: J.J. Moser, 60th, 2021; Emil Lilleberg, 107th, 2021; Dylan Guenther, 9th, 2021
DUBIOUS PICKS: Ilya Fedotov, 43rd, 2021; Artem Duda, 36th, 2022; Julian Lutz, 43rd, 2022
BEST TRADE: **IN** — Shayne Gostisbehere, 2nd rd pick, 7th rd pick from Phi. **OUT** — Future considerations. July 2021
WORST TRADE: **IN** — 6th rd pick from Nsh. **OUT** — Jason Zucker. March 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Logan Cooley, 1 yr @ \$950K
Clayton Keller, 3 yrs @ \$7.15M
Michael Kesselring, 1 yr @ \$1.4M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Juuso Valimaki, 1 yr @ \$2.0M
Lawson Crouse, 2 yrs @ \$4.3M
Matias Maccelli, 1 yr @ \$3.43M

GM SNAPSHOT



PATRIK ALLVIN

Hired: Jan. 2022 | **Drafts:** 3

ASTUTE PICKS: Elias Pettersson, D, 80th, 2022; Hunter Brzustewicz, 75th, 2023, Jonathan Lekkerimäki, 15th, 2022

DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A

BEST TRADE: **IN** – 3rd rd pick from Ott. **OUT** – Travis Hamonic. March 2022

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Marcus Pettersson, Drew O'Connor from Pit. **OUT** – Danton Heinen, Vincent Desharnais, Melvin Fernstrom, 1st rd pick. Jan. 2025

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Quinn Hughes, 2 yrs @ \$7.85M
Kiefer Sherwood, 1 yr @ \$1.5M
Tyler Myers, 2 yrs @ \$3M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

Elias Pettersson, 7 yrs @ \$11.6M
Dakota Joshua, 3 yrs @ \$3.25M
Filip Chytil, 2 yrs @ \$4.44M



VANCOUVER CANUCKS



THIS SOAP OPERA

of a year for the Canucks was a lousy follow-up to the fairy-tale season of 2023-24 when just about every player experienced a career best. The Canucks now face a gloomy future after this season was plagued with personality conflicts, the sketchy health of Thatcher Demko and speculation about Quinn Hughes wanting to move on while coach Rick Tocchet did exactly that.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: With the loss of productive forwards – both past and to come – the Canucks need proven replacements. The traded J.T. Miller and UFAs Brock Boeser and Pius Suter combined for more than 90 goals in 2023-24.

And after finishing sixth in league scoring that season, the Canucks dropped to 23rd this year. There's a looming power outage on the West Coast.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Hughes turns 26 this year, and he's the youngest regular on the Vancouver blueline. With his long-term future uncertain, the Canucks are in dire need of restocking the pipeline with replacements for him and aging veterans like Tyler Myers and Derek Forbort. Prospect Tom Willander has high upside, but two or three others will be needed in the coming years.

CAP SITUATION: The Canucks have the cap room for Boeser, but how they deploy it is uncertain. They have more

than just one or two needs if they decide to keep what remains of the core intact.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson's buyout penalty doubles to \$4.77 million next season. Not ideal.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Right winger Jonathan Lekkerimäki got into 24 NHL games this season but with limited ice time. There will be an opening in the top six – and power-

play time – for him. Likewise, 21-year-old Elias Pettersson will become a blueline regular.

DID YOU KNOW: The Canucks hope to have unearthed a late-round gem in Finnish goalie Aku Koskenvuo. The fifth-rounder from 2021 spent parts of three years at Harvard and played in the 2023 WJC. Vancouver signed him to a pro deal in March. – **BRIAN COSTELLO**



QUINN HUGHES

GM SNAPSHOT



KELLY MCCRIMMON

Hired: May 2019 | **Drafts:** 6

ASTUTE PICKS: Pavel Dorofeyev, 79th, 2019; Trevor Connelly, 19th, 2024, Tuomas Uronen, 192nd, 2023

DUBIOUS PICKS: Peyton Krebs, 17th, 2019; Brendan Brisson, 29th, 2020; Zach Dean, 30th, 2021

BEST TRADE: **IN** – Adin Hill from SJ. **OUT** – 4th rd pick. Aug. 2022

WORST TRADE: **IN** – Two 3rd rd picks from Wsh. **OUT** – Logan Thompson. June 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:

Pavel Dorofeyev, 1 yr @ \$1.84M
Brett Howden, 5 yrs @ \$2.5M
Brayden McNabb, 3 yrs @ \$3.65M

WORST VALUE DEALS:

William Karlsson, 2 yrs @ \$5.9M
Ben Hutton, 1 yr @ \$975K



VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS



ANOTHER SEASON,

another year among a select group of Cup contenders. Vegas has made the play-offs in seven of eight seasons. The year they missed? The Golden Knights had 94 points in 2021-22. Even when they're bad, these guys are good.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: Vegas has the deepest forward lineup in the league, with an excellent blend of production, experience and versatility. The only downside is that late-season additions such as Reilly Smith and Brandon Saad, as well as bottom-six regulars Tanner Pearson and Victor Olofsson, are UFAs this summer, and there's only enough cap room to retain a couple of them. The

carrot of a Cup run will surely lure a proven UFA or two.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: The Golden Knights have made it a priority to lock up their minute-munching defensemen well before they hit the open market. To that end, the blueline is set for two to three years. But by then, top-four rocks Alex Pietrangelo and Brayden McNabb will be 37. And there isn't a prospect in the system projected to be anywhere close to their caliber of play.

CAP SITUATION: As always, it's stretched. The \$7.5-million cap hike to \$95.5 million will mostly be eaten up by off-season raises for Shea Theodore (\$2.25 million), Adin Hill (\$1.35 million), Keegan Kolesar (\$1.1



ALEX PIETRANGELO

million), McNabb (\$800,000) and Brett Howden (\$600,000). After a UFA or two is re-signed, that just leaves pocket change.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Vegas signed 2024 first-round pick Trevor Connelly after his freshman NCAA season at Providence. The left winger got into a handful of AHL games and may be ready for permanent NHL duty by mid-season.

If the Golden Knights move on from Ilya Samsonov, the time is right for Akira Schmid to be the permanent backup.

DID YOU KNOW: Of the eight Golden Knights' first-round picks in eight years, only three played games for Vegas: Cody Glass (66), Peyton Krebs (13) and Brendan Brisson (24). Seven of the eight are now with other teams. – **BRIAN COSTELLO**



WASHINGTON CAPITALS

ONE TREND IN

Washington's drafting is a willingness to take a chance on players who others saw as flawed. Cole Hutson doesn't have typical size, but he ended up becoming the first D-man to outright lead the WJC in scoring. Andrew Cristall is slight and doesn't have a perfect stride but had 132 points in 57 WHL games this year. Ilya Protas went from an unknown USHLer to 124 points in the OHL.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Caps were one of the NHL's best teams, so there's not much need for anything right now. If you're really going to nitpick, another veteran D-man would be nice since the

Capitals were "only" ninth in goals against, while they were second in offense.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Eventually, Alex Ovechkin will retire, and scoring goals will become someone else's domain. But who will it be? Aliaksei Protas (Ilya's older brother) is coming off his first 30-goal campaign, and Dylan Strome, now 28, led the team in points, so any future additions – Cristall, for example – have time to develop before the Capitals truly need an infusion up front.

CAP SITUATION: The Capitals are going to lose some veteran depth. With around \$9 million in cap space, it's inevitable. Pending UFAs include Andrew Mangiapane, Lars Eller

and Anthony Beauvillier. There are some internal replacements available, so the Caps can deal with it – especially given how loaded the roster will still be.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: Ryan Leonard jumped straight from Boston College to the NHL at the end of the year. The tenacious and talented right winger is the perfect next-gen player for Washington, as he

can fit up and down a lineup with his physical game. Cristall will be one to watch at training camp as well.

DID YOU KNOW: Ilya Protas wasn't even drafted into the USHL. He was given a shot with Des Moines as a favor and then proceeded to finish second in team scoring before moving on to OHL Windsor this season. – RYAN KENNEDY



ALIAKSEI
PROTAS



GM SNAPSHOT



CHRIS
PATRICK

Hired: July 2024 | **Drafts:** 0

ASTUTE PICKS: N/A
DUBIOUS PICKS: N/A
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Jakob Chych-run from Ott. **OUT** – Nick Jensen, 3rd rd pick. July 2024
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Lars Eller from Pit. **OUT** – 3rd rd pick, 5th rd pick. Nov. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Dylan Strome, 3 yrs @ \$5.0M
Aliaksei Protas, 4 yrs @ \$3.38M
Connor McMichael, 1 yr @ \$2.1M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Pierre-Luc Dubois, 6 yrs @ \$8.5M
Trevor van Riemsdyk, 1 yr @ \$3.0M
Sonny Milano, 1 yr @ \$1.9M



WINNIPEG JETS

THE JETS' FORMERLY

well-stocked pipeline has thinned out considerably. The causes are twofold. First, Winnipeg's on-ice success has led to late first-round choices. And second, deadline dealing has required GM Kevin Cheveldayoff to spend draft capital. Given the challenges of recruiting free agents to Winnipeg, the Jets' long-term stability is inextricably linked to their ability to unearth talented prospects, perhaps more so than any other franchise.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The Jets believe they have a hole at second-line center, behind Mark Scheifele and ahead of Vladislav Namestnikov and Adam Lowry. And while Cole

Perfetti had his best season to date, he's not yet proven he can take on full-time pivot duty.

LONG-TERM NEEDS: Winnipeg spent its only top-100 pick last summer on defender Alfons Freij, at 37th overall in the second round. Meanwhile, rearguard Elias Salomonsson is finding his way with AHL Manitoba. But the Jets have a veteran-laden D-corps with few blue-chippers on the way. The club needs to usher in an eventual successor for Josh Morrissey, who's now 30.

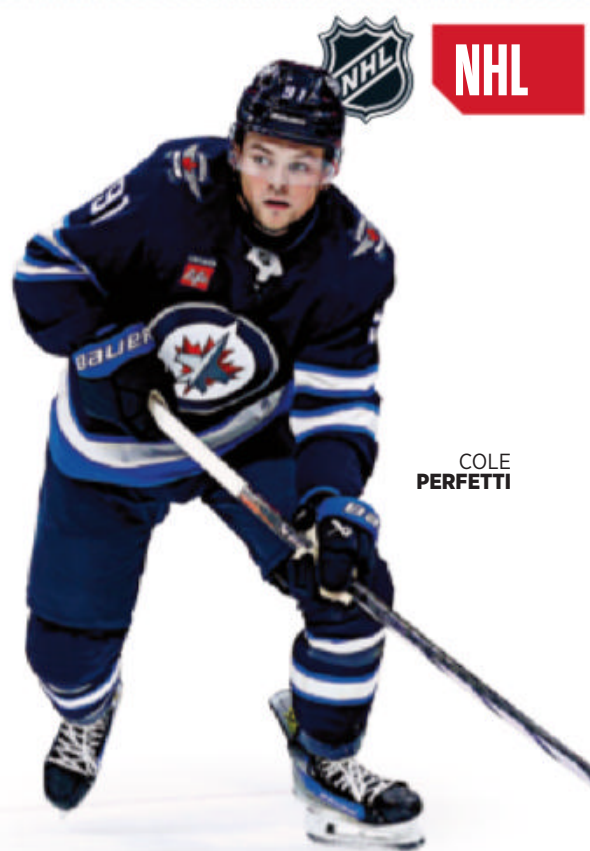
CAP SITUATION: The good news? Winnipeg is projected to have upward of \$25 million in its cap coffers. The bad news? Pending UFAs include Nikolaj Ehlers, and the Jets' RFA class

is headlined by Gabe Vilardi and Dylan Samberg. There's enough money to keep the roster intact, but meaningful upgrades will require Cheveldayoff to get creative.

IN THE SYSTEM 2025-26: The efficacy of the Jets' patient approach to shepherding Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov onto the big club is likely to be put to the test next season. The

pair have played a combined 11 NHL games in the past two seasons with favorable results.

DID YOU KNOW: Canadian D-man Isaak Phillips repped Jamaica at a 2018 international showcase tournament. His paternal grandparents hail from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and those with Caribbean heritage were allowed to suit up for Jamaica. – JARED CLINTON



COLE
PERFETTI



GM SNAPSHOT



KEVIN
CHEVELDAYOFF

Hired: June 2011 | **Drafts:** 14

ASTUTE PICKS: Connor Hellebuyck, 130th, 2012; Kyle Connor, 17th, 2015; Josh Morrissey, 13th, 2013
DUBIOUS PICKS: Kristian Vesalainen, 24th, 2017; Lukas Sutter, 39th, 2012; Ville Heinola, 20th, 2019
BEST TRADE: **IN** – Gabe Vilardi, Alex Iafallo, Rasmus Kupari, 2nd rd pick from LA. **OUT** – Pierre-Luc Dubois. June 2023
WORST TRADE: **IN** – Sean Monahan from Mtl. **OUT** – 1st rd pick, 3rd rd pick. Feb. 2024

CONTRACT TRACKER

BEST VALUE DEALS:
Kyle Connor, 1 yr @ \$7.14M
Josh Morrissey, 3 yrs @ \$6.25M
Connor Hellebuyck, 6 yrs @ \$8.5M
WORST VALUE DEALS:
Colin Miller, 1 yr @ \$1.5M

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PWHL



PWHL

HEADING WEST

After two seasons, the PWHL is growing to eight teams with the additions of Vancouver and Seattle. And this round of expansion appears to be just the beginning **BY IAN KENNEDY**

WHEN NINE-YEAR-OLD Sydney Milden, who plays for the Vancouver Angels girls hockey team, stepped up to the microphone, her excitement, much like that of everyone gathered, was obvious.

Surrounded by her teammates, with mountains as a backdrop, Milden proclaimed four words that PWHL fans in Vancouver had been waiting to hear: “We got a team.”

It was the first of two expansion announcements – followed one week later by a similar

proclamation in Seattle – that saw the PWHL expand west. Much like the NHL, the PWHL started with an Original Six, with teams in Boston, Minnesota, Montreal, New York, Ottawa and Toronto.

The league’s expansion to Vancouver and Seattle gives the PWHL a formal presence from coast to coast. Before their selection, Vancouver and Seattle were part of the PWHL Takeover Tour this year, drawing 19,038 and 12,608 fans, respectively. Interest from both markets was on full display, not only from fans but also from local government, corporate partners and the hockey community. This made it an easy decision to choose the cities as the PWHL’s first expansion markets.

“(Vancouver) really checked all the boxes for us, and we’re just really excited with the market here, all of the youth hockey that happens here, and the development that’s happening here in British Columbia,” said Jayna Hefford, the PWHL’s executive vice-president of hockey operations. “It’s really an emerging hockey market. I can’t wait to get the team on the ice here as a pri-



After months of speculation, Hefford and the PWHL made the league’s expansion plans official in late April.

mary tenant in the Pacific Coliseum and really build our presence here in Vancouver.”



Vancouver and Seattle will be part of new West Coast road trips for the league, easing travel burdens. The new teams will expand national broadcasting opportunities, and the league hopes the two teams – separated by only 143 miles – will quickly form a natural rivalry. “I’ve talked about it a lot that we’ve had a bunch of criteria that were really important for us when we looked at where we would go,” said Amy Scheer, the PWHL’s executive vice-president of business

operations. “And we’ve got two facilities here in Climate Pledge Arena and the Kraken Community Iceplex that are world-class facilities. There’s a burgeoning ice-hockey youth community here, and we want to really continue to build on the momentum that the Kraken have started and continue on those efforts to get more kids on the ice, both boys and girls.”

Scheer also emphasized that, for Seattle, it is “obviously great to have a rivalry with Vancouver.” As Scheer stated, venues were a primary focus. After the league’s first season of operation, Montreal, Toronto and New York made permanent venue changes, and Boston

PHOTOS BY PWHL



ARENA ANCHORS

Vancouver will play its home games – and be the primary tenant – at the 15,713-seat Pacific Coliseum.

could be next. The frequent moves between arenas presented challenges on the logistical side and, more importantly, to the growth of consistent fan bases. It's a point the league wants to get right from Day 1 with its expansion teams.

In Vancouver, the league will, for the first time, find one of its teams as the venue's primary tenant. This season, Minnesota and New York were forced to reschedule games late in the year with less than two weeks' notice due to the needs of NHL teams for playoff dates. In oth-

er markets, teams have played fewer weekend games than they'd like. Vancouver, which is set to play its home games at the Pacific Coliseum, former home to the NHL's Vancouver Canucks, will have none of those issues. Being a primary tenant means the league will have more flexibility regarding scheduling. It will also help with branding, including putting PWHL Vancouver's logo at center ice, something no other PWHL team has been able to do for a full season.

"This is a first for us to be a primary tenant in a building," Scheer said, "which will really allow us to maximize options around our schedule and really allow us to maximize our business. We're excited to have that first opportunity for our league

going into our third season. It's a pretty big step for us."

In Seattle, the new franchise will share its home venue with the NHL's Kraken and WNBA's Storm at Climate Pledge Arena. While sharing a rink with an NHL team is nothing new for the league, it is the first time in North American professional sports that two

league did announce primary colors, however. Seattle will wear emerald green, and Vancouver will wear Pacific blue.

The growth to eight teams is only the initial step in a larger expansion plan for the PWHL. "For all of the cities that expressed interest, if you're not chosen for this year, it doesn't mean you won't be chosen," Scheer said. "You could be chosen next year, the year after..."



pro women's teams will cohabitate in a venue. With Seattle also being the home to a National Women's Soccer League team (the Reign), Scheer called the market the "capital of women's sports."

Neither team was initially given a nickname, and they will go by PWHL Vancouver and PWHL Seattle for now. The



We're very much at the beginning of our journey in helping to build and grow this league in the sport of women's hockey."

That will be music to the ears of several cities, including Denver, Detroit, Edmonton and Quebec City, all of which had strong showings at their stops on the PWHL Takeover Tour. And the fact that more expansion is planned shows that the demand for professional women's hockey in North America remains on the rise. **H**





Sarah Fillier, second from right, went No. 1 in 2024 and was welcomed by Hefford, Ilana Kloss and Billie Jean King.



PWHL

MORE TEAMS, MORE PLAYERS

This year's PWHL draft takes on an extra layer of importance as the league expands from six to eight teams **BY IAN KENNEDY**

THE PWHL IS EXPANDING, and with the addition of two teams, the league will require a larger player pool. The first step in that process is the 2025 PWHL draft. To be held in Ottawa on June 24, the draft will welcome another cohort of NCAA stars, national-team staples and European players.

"The draft is one of the most exciting times of the year for our league, as it represents the future of the game," said Jayna Hefford, the PWHL's executive VP of hockey operations. "We're looking forward to welcoming a new class of elite talent and giving fans a first look at the next wave of hockey stars. Hosting this year's draft in Ottawa, a city that has incredibly passionate fans, is sure to be an unforgettable experience."

With two new teams heading to Vancouver and Seattle in time for next season, the draft will provide crucial building

blocks for the incoming clubs, and there's no shortage of talent coming up through the ranks. Among the top players heading to the PWHL via the draft are Kristyna Kaltounkova, Casey O'Brien, Haley Winn, Nicole Gosling, Michelle Karvinen, Rory Guilday and Natalie Mlynkova. While college graduates will dominate the proceedings, veterans such as Karvinen, Russia's Anna Shokhina and Sweden's Sara Hjalmarsson will also throw their names into the hat to show the world they can play among the best.

Unlike the NHL, the PWHL requires players to declare themselves eligible for the draft, which means they cannot be under contract with any European team unless they have a PWHL out-clause in place. And if they declare for the draft, players forfeit the remainder of their NCAA eligibility.

Abbey Murphy and Lacey Eden, who were projected to be top-10 picks this summer, chose to return to the NCAA



for another year despite having already spent five seasons at their schools. Murphy and Eden pushing their eligibility to the stacked 2026 draft adds another level to an already talented cohort that will see Caroline Harvey, Laila Edwards, Tessa Janecke, Kirsten Simms, Nelli Laitinen and a wealth of top European players join next year.

As Hefford stated following the expansion announcement, the caliber of play in the PWHL remains a primary focus, and the league wants its new teams to "compete on Day 1 for the Walter Cup." That will happen through both an expansion draft and the PWHL draft itself.

The 2024 PWHL draft consisted of seven rounds with a total of 42 players being selected. With the PWHL needing to bring in 46 new players to meet roster requirements for the expansion teams, before retirements or attrition, the draft

ABBHEY'S ROAD

Murphy was projected to go No. 1 this summer, but she chose to return to college and will enter the 2026 draft.

itself could balloon or result in intense competition for undrafted free agents.

One player who will not wait long to hear her name at the draft is Kaltounkova, a Colgate grad. The power forward made her senior-team debut for Czechia at the 2025 worlds and earned a tournament all-star nod by showcasing her unique two-way physical presence and pure goal-scoring prowess. She's considered a candidate to go first overall. While some European players dream of going home to play after their NCAA days, Kaltounkova has always had her eyes set on North American dreams, even when that path was unclear. "Grow-



ing up, I dreamed of playing in the NHL,” Kaltounkova wrote to The Hockey News. “When I got to high school, I realized that’s just a dream, and it will never happen. I used to think that I could never be able to represent a city or have fans who aren’t from my country. The PWHL gives players like me the chance to experience a different life. I will make the most of this opportunity, and I hope to inspire others along the way. I am so grateful for the women that came before me to build this league and gave players like me this opportunity.”

KAL TO ACTION

Kaltounkova’s blend of goal-scoring and physicality makes her one of the draft’s most intriguing prospects.

Unlike NHL draftees, the majority of women selected in the 2025 PWHL draft will immediately step into the league and be expected to contribute. To have that chance is something that didn’t exist only a few years ago, and it has the incoming NCAA cohort excited for the future. One of those players is Quinnipiac captain Kendall Cooper.

Cooper is a former captain of Canada’s U-18 national team and also played for Canada’s national development team this season. She’s watched the growth of the PWHL in its first two seasons and is excited to join the mix. “It’s incredible to witness the growth of the PWHL over the last couple of years,” Cooper said. “And now, to have the chance to be drafted and hopefully play with and against the best players is something I

could have never imagined.”

Cooper will have a better chance than many. She’s one of the top blueliners available in a draft that doesn’t have an excess of high-end defenders. Another ‘D’ projected to be picked in the first two rounds is the 5-foot-11 Guilday. She has already won gold with Team USA at the 2023 World Championship and recently completed her NCAA career at Cornell. “It is incredibly special



to have something to strive for post-college,” Guilday said. “It has been so cool to watch the league grow even in this past year and so fun to watch how good the hockey is. It would be an incredible opportunity to get the chance to play in the PWHL. Playing with and against the best female players in the world is definitely something to look forward to.”

The 2025 draft will mark another new era for the burgeoning league, welcoming another wave of talent to entertain fans in the league’s eight markets. **H**

ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU’LL FIND OUR RANKINGS FOR THE TOP 48 PLAYERS AVAILABLE FOR THE 2025 PWHL DRAFT >



1

**KRISTYNA
KALTOUNKOVA****C, 23, Colgate (ECAC)**
37-26-22-48-57

➤ Kaltounkova is big and physical and loves to drive the net. A dangerous shooter and understated two-way player, she is built for the PWHL.

2

**HALEY
WINN****D, 21, Clarkson (ECAC)**
38-14-32-46-10

➤ Winn is a fantastic skater who is dangerous in transition. She sees the ice well and drives offense from the back end. She's a top-four stalwart with Team USA.

3

**CASEY
O'BRIEN****C, 23, Wisconsin (WCHA)**
41-26-62-88-2

➤ Patty Kazmaier Award winner has elite offensive instincts. She was the NCAA's leading scorer by a landslide and will immediately fit into any team's top six.

4

**NICOLE
GOSLING****D, 23, Clarkson (ECAC)**
40-12-27-39-29

➤ Gosling is a smart blueliner who makes a good first pass. The 2024 first-team all-American manages her own zone and can also contribute offensively.

5

**NATALIE
MLYNKOVA****LW, 24, Minnesota (WCHA)**
39-16-18-34-10

➤ Mlynkova is everywhere the puck is. The Czech national-team star has good skills in traffic, relentlessly pursues the play and generates turnovers.

6

**RORY
GUILDAY****D, 22, Cornell (ECAC)**
30-5-4-9-22

➤ The 5-foot-11 defender uses her size and reach to play a shutdown role. Guilday is mobile for her size and makes good choices with the puck.

7

**MICHELLE
KARVINEN****LW, 35, Frolunda (Swe.)**
32-21-14-35-10

➤ The veteran still has elite vision, playmaking skills and makes those around her better. Finland's all-time leading scorer wants to prove herself in the PWHL.

8

**ANNE
CHERKOWSKI****C, 22, Clarkson (ECAC)**
40-17-28-45-21

➤ Versatile forward who can move up and down the lineup with her two-way awareness and speed. Given the chance, she can also be a top-six forward.

9

**KENDALL
COOPER****D, 23 Quinnipiac (ECAC)**
37-7-19-26-10

➤ Cooper is a fierce competitor who likes to join the rush, plays with an edge and skates like a pro. The 5-foot-8 defender can carry the puck up ice as well.

10

**JENNA
BUGLIONI****C, 23, Ohio State (WCHA)**
38-17-25-42-27

➤ A highly intelligent player who drives possession and puts herself in dangerous scoring positions. She's undersized but uses her skating to make up for it.

11

**ELLA
HUBER****C, 22, Minnesota (WCHA)**
42-15-33-48-24

➤ Huber has speed and intelligence. She can find seams and generate time for herself as a deceptive puckhandler and by changing her pace on entries.

12

**ABBY
HUSTLER****RW, 22, St. Lawrence (ECAC)**
39-19-20-39-14

➤ Hustler sees the ice well. She's an excellent playmaker and powerful presence. Hasn't had much of a look from Canada's national teams, but she'll be a good pro.

13



KIARA ZANON

LW, 22, Ohio State (WCHA)
40-12-20-32-12

➤ A possession player, Zanon is a good skater with a high hockey IQ who has been a model of consistency in the NCAA. She projects as a playmaker.

14



SARA HJALMARSSON

C, 27, Linköping (Swe.)
31-12-11-23-32

➤ Hjalmarsson has good size and likes to play a physical game. She gets to the dirty areas on the ice, and she's a net-front power-play threat.

15



NINA JOBST-SMITH

D, 23, Minnesota-Duluth (WCHA)
37-3-15-18-18

➤ Jobst-Smith is underrated but played big minutes for Minnesota-Duluth and Team Germany. She rarely loses a puck battle and does the little things right.

16



VITA PONYATOVSKAYA

D, 22, Yale (ECAC)
30-6-5-11-12

➤ As a defender, Ponyatovskaya can dazzle. Walking in from the blueline or joining the rush, she's a dynamic player. She uses her feet well to defend.

17



SKYLAR IRVING

C, 23, Northeastern (HE)
37-17-16-33-16

➤ A reliable two-way center whose defensive game shines and leads to offensive opportunities. Irving is next in line out of Northeastern's hockey factory.

18



SANNI AHOLA

G, 25, St. Cloud State (WCHA)
8-8-3, 2.22, .917

➤ Ahola has great edgework, and she's calm in her crease. She plays a technical game, but she can break form to make a big athletic save when needed.

19



ANNA SHOKHINA

RW, 28, St. Petersburg (Rus.)
42-30-43-73-16

➤ Shokhina led the ZhHL in scoring by a mile. There's no Russian forward on the planet more decorated. She's older than other "prospects," but worth the risk.

20



MAYA LABAD

LW, 23, Quinnipiac (ECAC)
38-15-12-27-8

➤ Labad likes to get herself to the net. The 5-foot-7 winger scores in different ways, but they all count. She's a player who has more upside than most.

21



MAKENNA WEBSTER

RW, 23, Ohio State (WCHA)
30-12-23-35-12

➤ Webster is a smart two-way winger with good instincts. She's constantly on the puck and driving play. Size is rightfully a concern at 5-foot-3.

22



ANNA SEGEDI

C, 24, St. Lawrence (ECAC)
39-10-14-24-14

➤ She dances around the ice, flashing elite hands and agility. Segedi's separation speed and creativity are pro-level. Few players see the ice as well as she does.

23



PEYTON HEMP

RW, 22, Minnesota (WCHA)
42-16-17-33-25

➤ She has a good release and plays a solid 200-foot game. Hemp has upside at the next level because she thinks the game well and can create plays.

24



EMMA GENTRY

C, 22, St. Cloud State (WCHA)
36-13-7-20-33

➤ At 5-foot-11, Gentry uses her size and strength to her advantage. Attention to detail should allow her to thrive as a role player, and she can also chip in offensively.

W 25



CLARA VAN WIEREN

C, 23, Minnesota-Duluth (WCHA)
39-17-23-40-20

➤ Van Wieren uses her 5-foot-10 frame to thrive at both ends. And she's coming from a Minnesota-Duluth program that's known for producing pros.

26



SARAH WOZNIEWICZ

RW, 21, Wisconsin (WCHA)
41-9-12-21-19

➤ Not a ton of offense, but she brings speed and momentum to the ice. Dogged in pursuit of the puck, Wozniwicz thrives in her own zone.

27



DAYLE ROSS

D, 22, St. Cloud State (WCHA)
36-2-13-15-29

➤ Ross is a powerful skater who does the little things right. She takes away time and space and is hard on pucks. She might turn into a steal.

28



RILEY BRENGMAN

D, 22, Ohio State (WCHA)
40-4-15-19-27

➤ Brengman likes to close shooting lanes with her body and isn't afraid to block shots. She could be a consistent third-pair defender. A good passer.

29



HANNAH MURPHY

G, 21, Colgate (ECAC)
26-8-0, 1.86, .939

➤ Murphy is the best North American goalie available. She's calm in big moments and uses her size and angles to challenge shooters. Could be a future starter.

30



HANNA BASKIN

D, 21, Minnesota-Duluth (WCHA)
38-1-21-22-11

➤ Baskin is solid in her own end. She blocks shots and is a good passer, moving the puck out of danger defensively. She's a low-risk prospect.

31



MORGAN NEITZKE

LW, 22, Lindenwood (AHA)
32-14-12-26-35

➤ Neitzke could be a sleeper coming out of Lindenwood. She displays lots of offensive skill in her game and likes to play physical. She'll fight for a spot.

32



LYNDIE LOBDELL

D, 22, Penn State (AHA)
38-4-17-21-42

➤ A reliable defender, Lobdell plays a responsible game and makes good decisions and outlet passes. She can handle the physical game as a third-pair blueliner.

33



MADDI WHEELER

LW, 22, Ohio State (WCHA)
40-7-14-21-32

➤ A 200-foot player, Wheeler can provide valuable minutes playing a puck-possession game and wearing down opponents. Her offense is a work in progress.

34



ANNA BARGMAN

LW, 22, Yale (ECAC)
32-13-10-23-8

➤ Whether it's expected goals, possession models, puck control, it doesn't matter – Bargman exceeds all expectations. Her habits should lead to good pro results.

35



OLIVIA WALLIN

LW, 23, Minnesota-Duluth (WCHA)
39-16-24-40-4

➤ Wallin goes to the tough areas on the ice. A possession player who generates a lot of chances, she's patient with the puck and has a wicked release.

36



LILY DELIANEDIS

C, 23, Cornell (ECAC)
35-12-10-22-10

➤ Delianedis finished strong in her senior year after a slow start offensively and had good metrics all season. Two-way player who does the little things well.

37



BRIANNA BROOKS

C, 22, Penn State (AHA)
38-11-13-24-12

➤ Brooks drives scoring chances and possession. Advanced stats rarely lie, and Brooks outperforms half the players above her on this list of prospects.

38



MADDY SAMOSKEVICH

C, 22, Quinnipiac (ECAC)
38-8-14-22-6

➤ Versatility is a key asset after she was moved from defense to center this year. Samoskevich likes to drive to the middle of the ice. She's strong on her feet.

39



TAMARA GIAQUINTO

D, 23, Boston University (HE)
38-9-9-18-10

➤ Giaquinto is a reliable two-way defender who doesn't flash and dash but takes care of her own zone, makes good outlets and defends well.

40



OLIVIA MOBLEY

RW, 23, Minnesota-Duluth (WCHA)
39-19-8-27-29

➤ She's bounced between three NCAA programs but has found success everywhere she's gone. Likes to drive down the ice and has good offensive instincts.

41



FANUZA KADIROVA

RW, 27, St. Petersburg (Rus.)
42-26-31-57-32

➤ Kadirova put up big numbers in a weak Russian league. She has great vision and slick hands. She's slight but comes with a bevy of international experience.

42



REECE HUNT

C, 24, Lulea (Swe.)
6-5-3-8-8

➤ Hunt got off to a spectacular start in the SDHL before an injury derailed her season. She's a great shooter in close and has excellent upside despite injury risk.

43



BROOKE BECKER

D, 23, Providence (HE)
35-5-13-18-28

➤ She wins a lot of puck battles and defends well. A model of consistency with good possession numbers. Becker isn't flashy, but she gets the job done.

44



JULIA SHAUNESSY

D, 23, Boston University (HE)
38-2-16-18-22

➤ Shaunessy is 6-foot-1 defender who can lug the puck up ice. She has good hands and vision and moves well for her size. Her upside is immense.

45



VANESSA UPSON

C, 21, Mercyhurst (AHA)
38-13-30-43-4

➤ Upson has played many roles and is counted on to produce, which she has done consistently. She's deceptive with the puck and is an excellent passer.

46



ALEXANDRA HUSZAK

C, 30, Budapest (Hun.)
13-11-13-24-14

➤ A high-pace player who attacks laterally through the neutral zone and on entry. She'll bring energy, offensive upside and experience to a bottom six.

47



MAGGY BURBIDGE

RW, 24, Fribourg-Gotteron (Sui.)
28-17-17-34-8

➤ The 2022-23 USports all-Canadian is creative and a deceptive puckhandler. She generates offense using her hands. Led her Swiss team in scoring this year.

48



LAURA FUOCO

C, 22, Dartmouth (ECAC)
29-8-8-16-6

➤ Fuoco is an intriguing forward who has more upside that can be tapped into at the pro level. Her 5-foot-11 frame is an asset as she likes to go to tough areas.



2026 SNEAK PEEK



RYAN ROOBROECK

ONE SCARY DOG

Niagara's Ryan Roobroeck is already an intimidating force at 17. Once he adds muscle to his 6-foot-4 frame, he'll be terrifying for defenders **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

WHEN RYAN Roobroeck went second overall to Niagara in the 2023 OHL draft, the IceDogs were in a bad spot.

New owner Darren DeDobelaer, who named himself GM, was suspended from those duties for violating rules surrounding an investigation that led to the OHL kicking Niagara players Landon Cato and Joshua Rosenzweig out of the league under its bullying-and-harassment guidelines. The team was about to hire its third coach in as many years, and now, they're on their fifth coach in five seasons.

So, in a league where you don't *have* to sign with the team that drafts you – trades are common and the USHL is always an option – Roobroeck could've balked. Instead, he saw brighter skies ahead in Niagara. "I had my interview with them, and there was nothing but great things they were talking about," he said. "Everything was going in the right direction, so I put my faith in them, and I knew what they could do to send me in the right direction for my career, so I decided to commit."

The hope around the 'O' is Niagara finally stabilizes, but at the least, the IceDogs have

breakout sophomore season for both him and the IceDogs, he's looking like a great option after Medicine Hat phenom Gavin McKenna in the 2026 NHL draft. Roobroeck saw his first OHL playoff action this spring, and while it was only for one round, the timing allowed him to join Team Canada at the U-18 worlds afterward. He ran wild, with nine points in seven games for the gold-medal winners. "It's been cool, meeting new guys from different leagues and seeing how they do things," he said. "And representing your country is special. It's something very important to me."

Former NHLer Cory Stillman coached Team Canada at the event, and he was familiar with Roobroeck since Stillman is also the bench boss in OHL Guelph. So he knew how hard it was to handle the kid on the ice. "He's a big body (6-foot-4, 190 pounds) who has a tremendous shot, and can make plays down low," Stillman said. "He made a big jump this year, and he'll make a bigger jump next year."



a solid young core with a lot of potential – and their big left winger is part of the solution.

Roobroeck, 17, finished as one of Niagara's top scorers in his rookie year, and thanks to a

For anybody like that, you have to be willing to compete against him and take away time and space. For a defenseman, you have to have a good gap because he doesn't need much time to

'26 SNEAK PEEK

release his shot, and when he does, it's a goal-scorer's shot."

Though he was one of the younger players on the team, Roobroeck bought into the Canadian system, something that's been key to success for the nation at all levels in recent years. "He's a great kid," Stillman said. "When you get to Hockey Canada, roles change. All these kids normally play power play and maybe on the half-wall. Ryan ended up being a net-front guy and sometimes bumper. His attitude there was great. He was

where I am right now. Leaning on him, seeing him go through the OHL and being in the 'A' right now, it's huge just having him to talk to, where I can ask him anything. Having him one call away is so important."

Funny enough, when it comes to NHL mentors, Roobroeck has always loved watching someone known for being one of the best smaller superstars in recent generations. "Someone I enjoyed watching, and still do, is Patrick Kane," he said. "Just the way he slows



willing to do whatever we needed him to do to win."

That spirit can partially be explained by the fact the Ice-Dogs winger grew up with older brother Dylan Roobroeck, a New York Rangers draftee who just finished his first AHL season in Hartford after playing in the OHL himself. Dylan is 6-foot-7, but Ryan never asked him to go easy when they played together as kids. "I have nothing but great things to say about him," Ryan said. "Growing up, I have memories I'll never forget, and it's helped me get to

the game down. The vision he has to make everyone on the ice around him better is sick."

When the 2025-26 season starts in Niagara, a lot of eyes will be on Roobroeck, and he plans to continue developing all parts of his game. "There's no place you're too good at," he said. "You have to keep steadily working on everything."

It hasn't been ideal in Niagara, but with Roobroeck's ability to thrive through adversity, it's not hard to see him being a problem for everyone else in the OHL next season. **H**



2026 PROJECTED TOP 10

1



GAVIN MCKENNA

LW, Medicine Hat (WHL)

McKenna absolutely demolished the WHL with his hands and creativity, spawning rumors he'll head to the NCAA and suit up for Michigan for his NHL draft year.

2



RYAN ROOBROECK

LW, Niagara (OHL)

Roobroeck is a big-bodied producer who has grown alongside his team. With the tools at his disposal, he's poised for big numbers again next season.

3



KEATON VERHOEFF

D, Victoria (WHL)

An archetypal NHL-style defenseman, Verhoeff has a blend of size and skating that makes him intriguing. He has the work ethic and two-way potential to make him a stud.

4



ETHAN BELCHETZ

LW, Windsor (OHL)

Belchetz is a monster of a teen at 6-foot-5 and 226 pounds. He can hurt you on the scoreboard, but he's also not afraid to crush you with a check or a fight.

5



COLIN FITZGERALD

C, Peterborough (OHL)

The talented, competitive and complete player did well on a bad Petes team. Fitzgerald is a character kid who also gets top marks in the faceoff circle.

6



IVAR STENBERG

LW, Frolunda Jr. (Swe.)

Stenberg is an excellent skater with great offensive instincts. He made noise for Sweden at the world under-18s and always seems to thrive internationally.

7

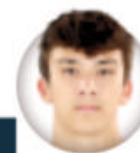


BRAIDY WASSILYN

LW, Niagara (OHL)

Part of Niagara's great young core, Wassilyn can really shoot the puck and has a knack for finding open spaces to create offense. He also has great playmaking skills.

8



RYAN LIN

D, Vancouver (WHL)

Lin is smooth offensively, as evidenced by his 53 points in 60 games. He's a new-school D-man who doesn't have a lot of size but makes up for it with his skating and skill.

9



XAVIER VILLENEUVE

D, Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)

Villeneuve isn't big – he's just 5-foot-10 and 150 pounds at this point – but his hands, elusiveness and skill come from the Lane Hutson school of excellence on the blueline.

10



VIGGO BJORCK

C, Djurgarden Jr. (Swe.)

Bjorck is the type of guy who plays bigger than his size. He's an incredibly smart player who makes others better and puts up numbers (74 points in 42 junior games).



2027

SNEAK PEEK

MAX PENKIN

MAX
POWER

At just 15, Max Penkin has already achieved something that none of his famous countrymen, including Draisaitl, Stutzle or Seider, were able to do

BY RYAN KENNEDY

WITH A SURPRISING third-place finish in their preliminary pool at the world under-18s, Germany showed that their junior program has a rosy future. One of the most exciting players on that U-18 team was also the youngest: center Max Penkin.

The first player to be granted exceptional status to join the German U-20 league a year early, Penkin put up impressive numbers for Jungadler Mannheim before donning his nation's jersey at the under-18s in Texas. And getting to play powerhouse countries such as Sweden and the U.S. only made the experience better. "It was nice to see how they play and how good they are," Penkin said. "It's a nice experience with the older guys and my mates. It's fun, and it's a high level."

Penkin plays at a high level himself. He rang up 50 points in 41 games for Mannheim before helping Jungadler to a title with 14 points in 11 playoff games. Mannheim and Team Germany shared several players, including diminutive and dynamic Dustin Willhoft and two-way forward brothers Gustavs and Rihards Griva. "It was good because when we practised, we could challenge each other and see how good we

Penkin showed why he was worthy of exceptional status, producing at better than a point per game at 15.



were," Penkin said. "In games, we used that skill, and we won the championship."

Considering some of the elite talents who have come out of Germany in recent years – Leon Draisaitl, Tim Stutzle and Moritz Seider, for example – it's wild that Penkin was the first to be granted exceptional status. But he wasn't intimidated by the challenge. "I always played with older guys, but not as old as this year," Penkin said. "But it seems normal for me, and I had fun with those older guys, getting new experiences."

A wicked scorer who elevates his game when his team needs him the most, Penkin also plays with a competitive edge, not unlike Connor Bedard. "Obviously, a lot can happen until his NHL draft year," one scout said. "But I'd go as far as to say he's the most talented player I've seen in Germany since Tim Stutzle, though not quite as good as Stutzle at the same age."

While it would be tempting for us in North America to dream about seeing Penkin in a major-junior uniform as soon as possible, his plans right now are all about Mannheim. That's where he's from, and that's the team he grew up watching, particularly left winger Mat-



MANN HANDLED

Penkin and coach Luigi Calce helped Jungadler lift Germany's U-20 DNL Cup this season.

tias Plachta. The next goal for Penkin is to put on a DEL jersey. "Next year, I will stay with the U-20 team, and hopefully, I can get some games with

the pros," he said. "I'm ready to go to the pros, but not for the whole season. There's no rush."

It will be worth following Penkin throughout his journey because the early returns suggest he'll be an impact player for Germany and, eventually, for one lucky NHL team in the coming years. **H**



MADDOX SCHULTZ

MAD ABOUT MADDOX

Maddox Schultz grew up watching first-overall WHL pick Connor Bedard tear it up in Regina. Now, as the Pats' latest No. 1 choice, Schultz is looking to bring more of that same magic to his hometown team **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

NO MATTER what Maddox Schultz does, big hockey names tend to be connected.

The Regina Pats took Schultz with the No. 1 pick in the 2025 WHL draft; the last time the Pats picked first, they took Connor Bedard in 2020.

When Schultz ripped the U-18 Telus Cup for 20 points in seven games this spring, he tallied the second-most points ever in the tournament by an underager; Sidney Crosby is the only underage player to have scored more. When Schultz watches the NHL,

he cheers for the Edmonton Oilers, led by Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. And when the 15-year-old center is studying players to emulate, he leans on two of the best 200-foot pivots ever. "Two guys that really stood out for me were Jonathan Toews and Patrice Bergeron," he said. "They were really good on faceoffs. Even Brayden Point and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins now. They can play an all-around good game and also produce at the highest level."

So yes, there's plenty to get excited about when it comes to Schultz, who will be eligible

to play up to 34 games in the WHL next season while spending the rest of the year with the U-18 Regina Pat Canadians, the same squad with whom he won the Telus Cup. Oh, and he scored the tournament-winning goal in OT at that event, too.

It hasn't been that long since Bedard was the big ticket in Regina, but what's cool about Schultz landing with the Pats is that he's from the city and got to watch Bedard weave his magic for the club. "I was probably 12 years old and playing on the Regina Pat Blues," Schultz said. "Our team went all the time. Seeing what he did made me try harder. It was pretty cool to grow up watching him, and, obviously, he's an unbelievable player doing his thing in the NHL now."

Getting drafted by his hometown team also affords Schultz the opportunity to live at home

PUT A BOW ON IT

Schultz scored the tournament-winning goal in overtime to cap his 20-point effort at the Telus Cup.

with his family, a luxury rarely afforded in high-level hockey. "To be drafted by the Pats was a dream come true," he said. "I couldn't be happier. My parents are really excited. And I am, too, being able to stay at home with them and my sister and my dog. I'm playing in the rink I grew up watching hockey in."

Regina will gladly welcome a player of Schultz's talent, even if he's only eligible to play half the season next year. The Pat with the most points in 2024-25 was Julien Maze, who managed just 44 points in 64 games overall – and only 25 points in 43 games after coming over from Everett. Meanwhile, Schultz had 43 goals and 93 points in 44 games for the Pat Canadians despite being the youngest player on the team – three years younger than some of his mates.

Schultz knows the WHL will offer stronger and tougher competition, so he's working on being harder in the faceoff circle. Otherwise, he's happy to contribute any way he can to win games for his new team. "I'm a 200-foot player with offense, but I can also be relied on in the defensive zone," he said. "I can put the puck in the back of the net and be a leader. I like to stand up for my teammates and be there for them." **H**





1990 DRAFT REWIND

PENN POSSIBILITIES

Had it not been for a management change in Philadelphia, it could have been the Flyers who drafted Jaromir Jagr instead of the cross-state rival Penguins **BY JARED CLINTON**

IN 2011, WHEN JAROMIR Jagr sought to return to the NHL from his years in the wilderness – or the KHL, as it's more commonly known – a reunion with the Pittsburgh Penguins seemed not only on the table but a logical career

capstone for the then-39-year-old hockey icon.

Drafted fifth overall by the Penguins in 1990, Jagr had risen from precocious talent emerging from behind the recently fallen Iron Curtain to a big-league superstar and Hart

Trophy winner. And while he'd first left the Penguins a decade earlier – a largely financially driven departure backdropped by an organization that was, at the time, on the brink of bankruptcy – a new day had dawned in Pittsburgh. Sidney Crosby's arrival, paired with that of Evgeni Malkin, Marc-Andre Fleury and Kris Letang, had seen the Penguins return to past glory and become an NHL powerhouse. The stars, seemingly, had aligned.

As free agency approached, though, the Penguins weren't the only team in the mix for Jagr's services. Reports suggested the Detroit Red Wings were in the hunt. So, too, were the Montreal Canadiens. But when Jagr finally put pen to pa-

STEAL TOWN

Jagr, the best player in the 1990 draft and one of the NHL's all-time greats, went to Pittsburgh at No. 5 overall.

per for his NHL return, he did so, somewhat stunningly, with the Philadelphia Flyers.

In the minds of some Pittsburgh faithful, it was a betrayal. Jagr was a former face of the franchise, yet he had spurned the Penguins for their in-state rivals, the Flyers. When he met with the media following his signing, Jagr addressed the situation. "If the Penguins feel like I did something wrong or something bad, I cannot change their minds," Jagr said. "If I hurt somebody, I apologize. I didn't mean it, but what people have to understand is that



it's my life, and I want to make the choice."

There is a world, however, in which Jagr's signing in Philadelphia, not Pittsburgh, might very well have marked his return to where his NHL career began. That it didn't, perhaps, all comes down to "philosophical differences," as Les Bowen wrote in the Dec. 1, 1990, issue of *The Hockey News*, between former Flyers president Jay Snider and GM Bobby Clarke.

As the story goes, it was only months before the 1990 draft that Clarke was suddenly and fairly unceremoniously given his walking papers by Philadelphia, for whom he'd been GM since the beginning of 1984-85. Though the firing came on the heels of the Flyers missing the post-season for the first time in 17 years, what seemed to contribute most to the decision to relieve Clarke of his duties was that he and Snider differed "on the direction of the team," as the latter said at the time. The prevailing notion was that Snider was interested in a full-scale rebuild, whereas Clarke was not. So, how did Clarke's firing potentially alter



JAROMIR JAGR

final available member of the draft's supposed preeminent prospects after Nolan, Nedved and Primeau had already been taken by the Quebec Nordiques, Vancouver Canucks and Detroit Red Wings, respectively.

In fairness, and in isolation, choosing Ricci was not entirely misguided. He was, for much of the buildup to the 1990 draft, considered the odds-on favorite to be selected first overall. In the season prior to his draft year, Ricci finished 10th in OHL scoring. He followed it up by finishing third in 1989-90, behind Primeau and Paul DiPietro but one spot ahead of Nolan. And even if Ricci didn't become an offensive superstar, he did evolve into one of the NHL's premier two-way forwards. He finished in the top four in Selke Trophy voting three consecutive seasons during his prime. He wasn't a slouch offensively, either. He registered more than 200 goals and more than 600 points in a career that finished one outing shy of 1,100 games.

Ricci ultimately played a pivotal role in Flyers history and NHL lore. He was a major part of the monumental trade package that Philadelphia sent to Quebec to pry a discontented Eric Lindros from the Nordiques. The deal was finalized in June 1992, coincidentally only weeks after Clarke returned to the Flyers as senior vice-president. (Here's something to ponder: would Philadelphia have pursued the Lindros trade had they selected Jagr in 1990? If so, would Jagr, like Ricci, have been part of the swap?)

The fact remains, though, that none of Ricci, Nolan, Nedved, Primeau, nor frankly any other skater taken in the 1990 draft, is in the same stratosphere as Jagr. Each of those who went before

SOME SCOUTS CONSIDERED JAGR TO BE THE MOST GIFTED OF THE BUNCH, **THOUGH IT WAS CONSIDERED 'A MINORITY VIEWPOINT'**

the course of Jagr's career and the 1990 draft?

Throughout the season and in the weeks and months leading up to the 1990 selection process, much of the hubbub centered around Owen Nolan, Petr Nedved, Keith Primeau and Mike Ricci, a quartet of

budding young players who were each believed to have the potential to be big-league stars. And among prospect hounds, there was plenty of debate and conjecture about who among the foursome was most well-equipped to step in and elevate an NHL franchise.

Some scouts, however, considered Jagr to be the most gifted of the bunch, though it was considered "a minority viewpoint," according to *The Hockey News*' 1990 Future Watch issue. As it turns out, among the most vocal of that minority may have been Clarke, who was noted as having proclaimed Jagr "the best player available." The excerpt regarding Jagr went on to note that it "remains to be seen if the scouting staff feels the same as Clarke." The answer came on draft day, when the Flyers stepped up to the podium and selected Ricci, the



Jagr scored at least 200 goals and 600 points. Others, such as Keith Tkachuk and Peter Bondra, can count themselves among the brotherhood of 500-goal scorers. Tkachuk, as well as Doug Weight, also joined Jagr as millennium men; all three scored at least 1,000 points. The 1990 draft has seen two of its players inducted into the Hall of Fame: Sergei Zubov and Martin Brodeur. (There's another deep retrospective to be written about the latter being taken 20th overall and as the second goalie off the board in 1990.)

selves, his first (1,273 games played) is the second-longest among his entire draft class, and his second (460 GP) would outrank all but 40 players. Maybe most jarring is the fact that more than half of those taken in the first round of the 2008 draft, most of whom were mere months old when the 1990 draft took place, had their playing days come to a close before Jagr.

But Jagr will not outlast any others. He has said 2024-25, his seventh as player-owner of Czech outfit Kladno, will be his last. With that, the final mem-



PERHAPS ONLY GORDIE HOWE STANDS AHEAD OF JAGR IN SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE AND CAREER LONGEVITY

Perhaps only Gordie Howe stands ahead of Jagr in sustained excellence and career longevity. While Jagr departed the NHL for the final time as a 45-year-old following 2017-18 – that's seven years younger than Howe, who turned 52 in his final campaign – consider that Jagr's big-league career continued past those of any player selected in any of the five drafts that followed his own.

And if Jagr's two distinct NHL tenures are taken by them-

ber of the 1990 draft class will skate off into the sunset. And though Jagr ultimately began his big-league career as a Penguin and not a Flyer, his journey took him across the NHL – yes, to Philadelphia, but to nine franchises in all. By the time he departed, for the second and final time, Jagr had become beloved league-wide, and he's now set to retire as a legend, an icon and a soon-to-be first-ballot Hall of Famer. That's worthy of a salute. **H**



1990 DRAFT REVISIONIST HISTORY

JUST LIKE THE REST of the hockey world, THN was bullish on Owen Nolan, Petr Nedved, Keith Primeau and Mike Ricci, with the cover of the 1990 Draft Preview calling them 'The Four Aces.' Meanwhile, Trevor Kidd's stellar performance with WHL Brandon was such that he was declared a "sure bet." But fraught is the business of projecting the future of teenagers who've yet to step foot in the toughest league in the world.

With the gift of hindsight, none of the four most prized prospects would have been selected in the top five, and Kidd wouldn't have been the first goaltender, or even second, to hear his name called. Instead, three all-time greats would headline the class, with Sergei Zubov leaping more than 80 places.

Zubov wouldn't be the biggest mover in a redraft, however. That honor would belong to Peter Bondra. A contemporary of Jaromir Jagr's in the Czech League, Bondra finished with seven more goals and only four fewer points in 1989-90 but was selected 151 picks later – with Washington plucking him 156th overall. Bondra told a Czech outlet in 2021 that he was only drafted because Jack Button, the Capitals' former director of player personnel, had travelled to Czechoslovakia to scout defenseman Richard Smeihlik. Button's keen eye turned into Washington's good fortune. Before Alex Ovechkin came along, Bondra was the Capitals' all-time leading goal-scorer. – **JARED CLINTON**

ROUND 1

1. QUEBEC NORDIQUES

Jaromir Jagr (5th overall by Pittsburgh)

2. VANCOUVER CANUCKS

Martin Brodeur (20th overall by New Jersey)

3. DETROIT RED WINGS

Sergei Zubov (85th overall by NY Rangers)

4. PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

Keith Tkachuk (19th overall by Winnipeg)

5. PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

Peter Bondra (156th overall by Washington)

6. NEW YORK ISLANDERS

Owen Nolan (1st overall by Quebec)

7. LOS ANGELES KINGS

Derian Hatcher (8th overall by Minnesota)

8. MINNESOTA NORTH STARS

Keith Primeau (3rd overall by Detroit)

9. WASHINGTON CAPITALS

Darryl Sydor (7th overall by Los Angeles)

10. TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Doug Weight (34th overall by NY Rangers)

11. CALGARY FLAMES

Alexei Zhamnov (77th overall by Winnipeg)

12. MONTREAL CANADIENS

Vyacheslav Kozlov (45th overall by Detroit)

13. NEW YORK RANGERS

Petr Nedved (2nd overall by Vancouver)

14. BUFFALO SABRES

Mike Ricci (4th overall by Philadelphia)

15. HARTFORD WHALERS

Robert Lang (133rd overall by Los Angeles)

16. CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

Geoff Sanderson (36th overall by Hartford)

17. EDMONTON OILERS

Craig Conroy (123rd overall by Montreal)

18. VANCOUVER CANUCKS

Mikael Renberg (40th overall by Philadelphia)

19. WINNIPEG JETS

Bryan Smolinski (21st overall by Boston)

20. NEW JERSEY DEVILS

Felix Potvin (31st overall by Toronto)

21. BOSTON BRUINS

Jason York (129th overall by Detroit)

CROSSWORD

BY LARRY HUMBER

Crossword grid with 21 numbered squares. A photo of a hockey player is placed in the center of the grid.

ACROSS

- 1 The nickname of London's OHL team
- 4 Talk or complain a lot
- 7 Stewart, a Hockey Hall of Famer also known as 'Old Poison'
- 8 NHL teams play an 82-game ____
- 10 Young players who generate great excitement
- 12 'Twig'
- 13 Goalie Jack Campbell is a Port ____ native
- 14 Beats badly with one's fists: two words
- 18 One-sided games
- 19 Don Cherry's dog
- 20 Sections of the ice
- 21 USA Hockey is based in Colorado ____

DOWN

- 1 They play at Crypto.com Arena
- 2 State that's had NHL hockey since 1926
- 3 Site of the 2014 Olympics
- 4 In the U.K., a shutout is known as a ____ (it also means fresh ice)
- 5 Fight, mix ____
- 6 The Cup donor, Lord Stanley of ____
- 9 Devil drafted first overall in 2019
- 11 The long-ago New York Americans briefly became the ____ Americans
- 12 Hockey's 'Hammer'
- 15 One of the Tanevs, pictured
- 16 'Captain Serious'
- 17 Rotate

Hockey TRIVIA



- > **BEGINNER:**
Before he was a Leafs icon and a Hall of Famer, the big Swede pictured above became the first European to be chosen first overall in an NHL draft. Who is he?
- > **INTERMEDIATE:**
Which current PWHler holds the uncommon distinction of being drafted into a league in which she had already won the championship trophy?
- > **EXPERT:**
Among players who made their debuts after the NHL first implemented its amateur draft in 1963, which undrafted player recorded the most career points?

Word SEARCH

These 10 players had the honor of heading up their NHL draft classes from 1990 to 1999.

1990s No. 1 Overall Pick

Word search grid containing letters for finding the names of the 1990s No. 1 Overall Picks.

- STEFAN
- LECAVALIER
- THORNTON
- PHILLIPS
- BERARD
- JOVANOVSKI
- DAIGLE
- HAMRLIK
- LINDROS
- NOLAN

PUCK PUZZLE

Can your hockey brain bring its A-game? The challenge is on!

Many notable coaches have enjoyed just a single Stanley Cup victory. Fill in the boxes with the names of seven one-time Cup winners and the name of the most recent such bench boss will appear in the red boxes.

Puck puzzle grid with letters and red boxes for filling in names of Stanley Cup winners and coaches.

TRIVIA: TOM SZCZERBOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; CROSSWORD: DAN HAMILTON-IMAGNI IMAGES

CROSSWORD SOLUTION: ACROSS 1. KNIGHTS, 4. CHIRP, 7. NELS, 8. SCHEDULE, 10. SENSATIONS, 12. STICK, 13. HURON, 14. PUNCHES OUT, 18. LAUGHERS, 19. BLUE, 20. ZONES, 21. SPRINGS
DOWN 1. KINGS, 2. ILLINOIS, 3. SOCHI, 4. CLEAN SHEET, 5. IT UP, 6. PRESTON, 9. JACK HUGHES, 11. BROOKLYN, 12. SCHULTZ, 15. CHRIS, 16. TOEWS, 17. TURN
PUCK PUZZLE SOLUTION: DEMERS, CARLYLE, BURNS, TROTZ, HITCHCOCK, BARBCK, LAVIOLETTE (FINAL ANSWER: MAURICE)



NCAA

PROJECT RUNWAY

While it's now unlikely he'll be drafted No. 1 after long being projected as the top pick, James Hagens could still end up the cream of this crop if he's put on the right path

FLIPPING THROUGH OLD ISSUES of The Hockey News is often quite telling. Take the 2023 edition of Draft Preview, for example. The featured player for the 2026 draft "sneak peek" was Medicine Hat's Gavin McKenna, who absolutely dominated the WHL this season and still very much looks like the No. 1 pick next year.



In that same issue, James Hagens was the featured player for the 2025 draft, which is now upon us. Hagens was also the top-rated pick in Future Watch and Draft Preview last year.

Now, is Hagens still the top prospect in the 2025 draft? Not so much. In fact, there's a good chance he slides several spots from the pinnacle, and I'm here to tell you folks that it's not his fault. Sometimes, players simply rise to the occasion, and in this wild world we call development, teenagers – shocker – can surprise you.

As you probably surmised from the cover of this issue, defenseman Matthew Schaefer of the OHL's Erie Otters is our No. 1 prospect. After that, we have OHL Saginaw cen-

ter Michael Misa, and this is where things get interesting. You can elevate Schaefer over Hagens without drawing much controversy since it's a defenseman versus a forward. But Misa and Hagens are both centers, so now you're really making a statement. There's even the possibility that another center, Anton Frondell, is preferred. Frondell is big and powerful and has already had success playing against men at the pro level back home in Sweden. Misa is bigger than Hagens and put up a beguiling 134 points for the Spirit this season, earning the OHL's Red Tilson Trophy as the league's most outstanding player.

Meanwhile, Hagens had a solid season as a freshman at Boston College, where, admittedly, his linemates were fantastic. Ryan Leonard and Gabe Perreault had already established themselves as two of the NCAA's most dangerous wingers when they were freshmen, lining up with future San Jose Shark Will Smith, and they continued that with Hagens. All three Eagles also helped Team USA win gold at the World Junior Championship in Ottawa, and Hagens

HOW QUICKLY THINGS CHANGE

Even though Hagens was a point-per-game player with Boston College this year, his draft stock still dropped.

certainly did his part. Did Boston College return to the NCAA championship game, as they had last year? No. The Eagles were taken out in the second round by Denver, who, coincidentally, beat BC in the final last year.

Fair or not, Macklin Celebrini offered a measuring stick in his 2024 draft year when he, like Hagens, was a college freshman up for the draft. Celebrini put up 64 points in 38 games for Boston University, leading the Terriers by a margin of 15 points over future Montreal D-man Lane Hutson. Celebrini also won the Hobey Baker Award, becoming the NCAA's youngest MVP ever in the process. Hagens, who is a bit smaller and slighter than Celebrini, put up 37 points in 37 games.

An admirable number for a teenager, but way off Celebrini's mark.

Personally, I would like to see Hagens return to college for his sophomore season, and it will be interesting to see what his draft team believes will be the right path. After all, we're still talking about a quick, brilliant player who can create a lot of offense and play with elite linemates. That's a great toolbox.

WOULD IT BE MADNESS TO TAKE HAGENS WITH THE NO. 1 PICK?

Maybe Hagens isn't the No. 1 prospect in the draft anymore, but I guarantee any NHL team would love to have him in their organization. One will snap up his rights early on, likely in the top five.

Now, the one wrinkle we haven't mentioned yet is that Hagens is from Long Island, and the New York Islanders have the first-overall selection. Would it be madness to take him with that pick? It might be risky, but it could also be a home run. Because another year in the Boston College weight room would do wonders for Hagens, and the quickness of his mind and hands simply cannot be taught. No matter where he ends up going in the draft, James Hagens will be fun to follow in the coming years. **H**

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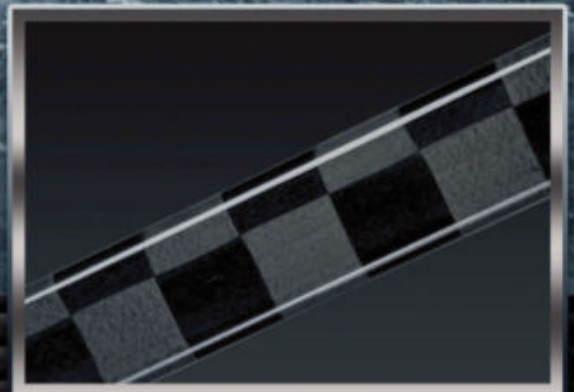
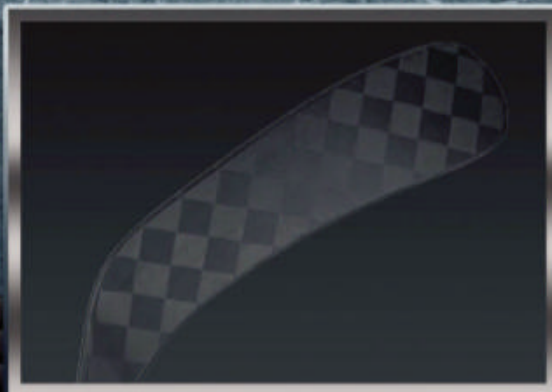
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